Richard Palliser

fighting the anti-Sicilians

combating 2 c3, the Closed, the Morra Gambit and other tricky ideas

EVERYMAN CHESS

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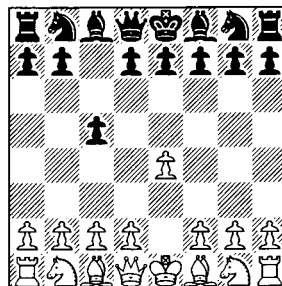
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Preface

White's many anti-Sicilian systems have been around for a while and I'm afraid that they're here to stay. Some players inwardly sigh every time they face one, but there's no need for such a reaction. Handling the anti-Sicilians successfully as Black is not all about employing a lot of slow, solid lines; on the contrary, Black can often fight for the initiative as we will see in this book. That does not mean that every recommendation will be dynamic and exciting; just the majority! Quite often a solid secondary system has been included, either to spoil White's fun (if he's after a massive hack, switching to a calm approach is not so silly), or to help Black avoid being move ordered (e.g. the c3 Sicilian doesn't have to begin with 2 c3; 2 ♘f3 e6 3 c3 being a more cunning approach).

White has a number of rather popular anti-Sicilian systems, including the fairly theoretical 2 c3 and the aggressive Grand Prix Attack. Indeed while researching this work, I kept being reminded just how many new ideas there have been in the anti-Sicilians over the past decade: some being very early surprises, such as 2 a3 and 2 ♘a3, others rather ambitious ones, like 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 ♛xd5 4 d4 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 ♗g4 6 dxc5!? (a line which is both fun to analyse and full of some promising novelties for Black, as we'll see in Chapter One). As such I've decided to make this work accessible to all Sicilian players by covering every single white alternative to 2 ♘f3, rather than just include White's theoretically more important systems both with and without 2 ♘f3. This has enabled at least two systems to be thoroughly explored against each of White's main alternatives to 2 ♘f3; one of which at least I hope will appeal to the reader.

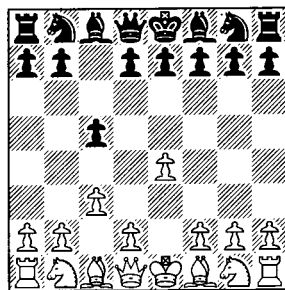
Throughout the emphasis has been on presenting 'fresh' lines where possible, although I have updated coverage from early anti-Sicilian works on a few rather

promising variations. As well as trying to explain the key ideas for both sides throughout, I've supplied a fair amount of analysis and up-to-date coverage in places, as well as much discussion of that modern bane, move orders.

I've enjoyed researching and analysing the vast majority of lines in this work. Indeed I must admit to quite looking forward to my Sicilian games in which White avoids 2 ♘f3! The systems covered here are often dynamic, sometimes quite unexplored and generally should be quite fun to play, if not for White to face. Above all, we are *fighting* against White's desired game plan, not becoming depressed and meekly submitting to a dull positional disadvantage. There's a reason why the majority of top grandmasters play 2 ♘f3 and 3 d4. It's now time to teach your opponent just why that is by posing him practical and theoretical problems in his favourite anti-Sicilian system.

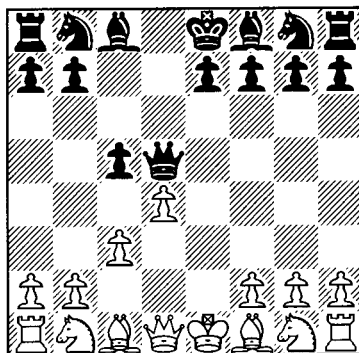
Richard Palliser,
York,
June 2007

Chapter One

The 2 c3 Sicilian

1 e4 c5 2 c3

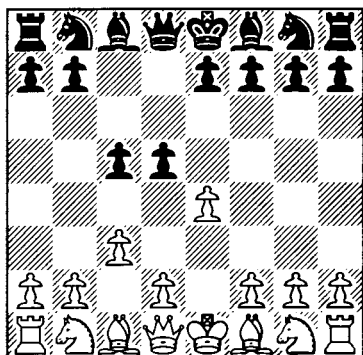
The c3 Sicilian is perhaps the most annoying of all the anti-Sicilians, at both international and club level. This is chiefly because it isn't such a bad opening, I'm afraid: not only does White want to build a pawn centre, but both main lines (2...♘f6 and 2...d5) allow him some chances for aggression, although they can also become frustratingly quite drawish should White be so inclined.

In a bid to unbalance the play we really need to force White to undertake some strategic risks. As such we will focus on 2...d5, not 2...♘f6. The latter remains very popular and is the more common choice against leading c3 standard-bearer Tiviakov, but it is nowadays rather theoretical and contains some fairly drawish variations. Furthermore, when up against his favourite opening the leading Dutch GM counters with 2...d5.

As the c3 Sicilian is so popular and because it can also arise via a 2 ♘f3 move order (as will be discussed later in Line C), we will consider two options for Black after **2...d5 3 exd5 ♕xd5 4 d4**:

A: 4...♘c6 5 ♘f3 ♗g4!?
B: 4...♘f6 5 ♘f3 e6

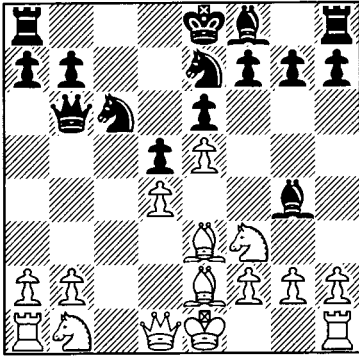
The former has received some recent attention and is a good practical try: should White respond too rou-

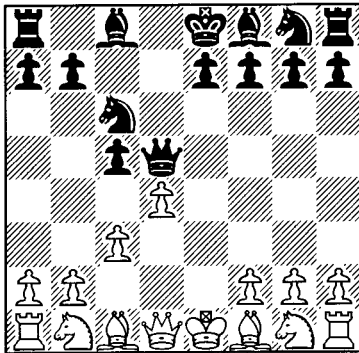
tinely, Black will emerge with a favourable set-up against the IQP. The latter is more solid and yet can sometimes become quite an unbalancing choice: White often gains some kingside possibilities in returning for accepting a weakness on d4 or c3; a fair trade should Black be seeking a double-edged game. Note too that Line B also contains some discussion of the move order 4...♘f6 5 ♘f3 ♘c6 (or 4...♘c6 5 ♘f3 ♘f6).

A)
1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5

3 exd5

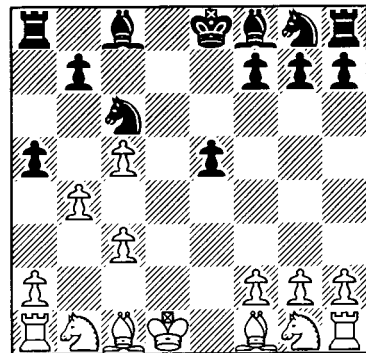
Black's 2...d5 ended White's hopes of constructing an ideal centre and the text, followed by accepting an IQP, is an almost unanimous response. Instead 3 d3 is extremely tame, although Black must then avoid falling for a psychological trap, and one prevalent throughout the anti-Sicilians in general, namely not to become overconfident and play to 'punish' White. Here Black should be content to have equalized so easily, while remembering that he is not yet better: White, by moving first, can often get away with a number of quiet or even slightly strange moves.

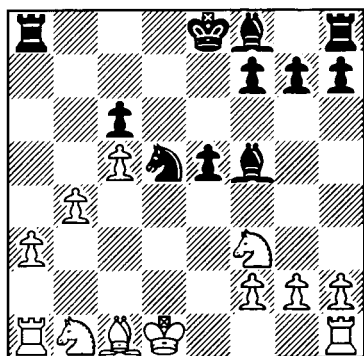
After 3 d3 Black enjoys free development and play might continue 3...♘c6 (the wholly independent approach is 3...dxe4 4 dxe4 ♕xd1+ 5 ♔xd1 ♘f6, although one must be aware that these queenless middlegames require Black to be happy with a complex manoeuvring struggle; 6 f3 a6 7 ♗e3 b6 8 ♘d2 ♘c6 9 a4 ♘d7! 10 f4 ♗b7 11 ♘gf3 e6 12 ♗d3 ♘a5 13 ♔e2 ♖c8, preparing ...c4 and ...♘c5, was a good way to deploy the black pieces in J.Hickl-F.Gheorghiu, Altensteig 1987) 4 ♘d2 ♘f6 5 ♘gf3 (5 f4?! is rather premature: 5...e5 6 f5?! g6 7 ♕f3 gxf5 8 exf5 h5! 9 g3 ♕d7 10 ♗h3 ♘g4 was already somewhat better for Black in C.Timmins-J.Nunn, Sheffield 1991), and now Black has a choice of reasonable and not especially theoretical King's Indian Attack lines to choose from, including 5...e5 and 5...g6 6 g3 ♗g7 7 ♗g2 0-0.

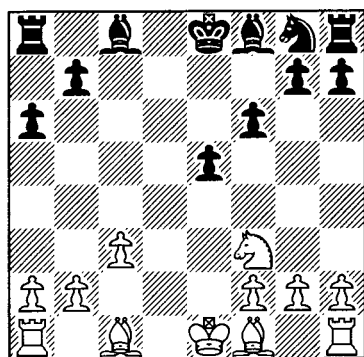
A more misguided approach, but one not unknown at lower club level is 3 e5?!. This allows Black a promising version of the French with his light-squared bishop deployed outside the pawn chain; for example, 3...♘c6 4 d4 (a cunning white player might omit this, but after 4 f4 ♗f5 5 d3 e6 6 ♗e2 h5! 7 ♘f3 ♗e7 8 0-0 ♘h6 9 a3 ♗g4 10 b4 ♘f5 Black's instructive play had given him the edge in any case in P.Blatny-M.Stangl, Brno 1991) 4...cxd4 5 cxd4 ♗f5 6 ♘f3 e6 7 ♗d3 ♗g4! (targeting the base of the pawn chain is Black's aim) 8 ♗e2 ♕b6 9 ♗e3 ♘ge7

10 ♘bd2 ♘f5 11 ♘b3?! a5 12 a4 ♗b4+ and now the unpleasant 13 ♔f1 was the only way for White to avoid losing a pawn in Ru.Jones-R.Palliser, York 1995.

3...♕xd5 4 d4 ♘c6

5 ♘f3

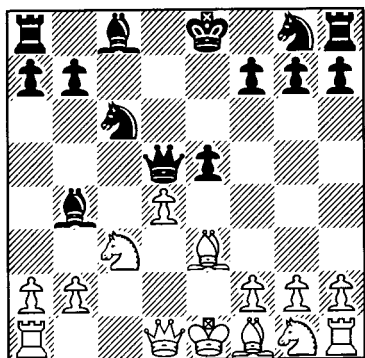
By far White's most common move, but occasionally he prefers one of:

a) 5 dxc5 is a radical capture which is becoming quite popular in the form of 5 ♘f3 ♗g4 6 dxc5 (and is also seen following 4...♘f6 5 ♘f3 ♗g4), but I must admit that I've always considered the immediate capture on c5 to be a risky bluff. Black should not recapture on c5, thereby giving White reasonable chances for an edge, but prefer the critical 5...♕xd1+ 6 ♔xd1 e5, gaining dangerous compensation after 7 b4 (7 ♗e3 enables Black to target the bishop: 7...♘f6 8 ♘f3 ♘d5! 9 b4 a5 10 b5 ♘d8 11 c6 ♘xe3+ 12 fxe3 bxc6 13 ♘xe5 ♗c5 saw Black retain good compensation in A.Zakharov-V.Isupov, Novgorod 1997, and 8 f3 ♘d5 9 ♗f2 ♗f5 10 ♘d2 0-0-0 also gives Black active and dangerous play) 7...a5! (Black should strike against the white queenside like this, whereas 7...♘f6 8 ♗b5! a5 9 ♘f3 is somewhat more awkward for him)

8 ♗b5 (the only way to maintain the extra pawn; 8 b5 ♘d8 9 ♗e3 ♘f6 10 ♘f3 ♘g4 was already a little better for Black in B.Goberman-M.Hartikainen, Helsinki 1997) 8...♗f5!? (more active than the older and still quite viable 8...♗d7) 9 a3 (shoring up b4, whereas 9 ♗xc6+ bxc6 10 ♘d2 ♘f6 11 ♘gf3 ♘d5 12 ♘xe5?! ♘xc3+ 13 ♔e1 axb4 saw that key pawn fall, leaving White in huge trouble in S.Bayat-S.Paridar, Teheran 2004; perhaps White should try the untested 9 ♘f3!?, attacking e5, but after

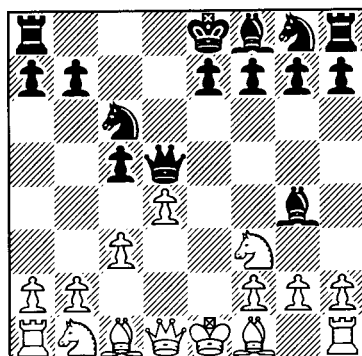
9...axb4 10 ♗xc6+ bxc6 11 cxb4 0-0-0+ Black retains fair compensation: ...♘f6-d5 and ...♗d3 may follow, while White will struggle to coordinate his undeveloped pieces) 9...♘f6. White's problem is not only his king position, but that any exchange on c6 will leave him perpetually weak on the light squares. M.Stolz-R.Valet, Neukloster 2001, continued 10 ♘f3 axb4 11 ♗xc6+ bxc6 12 cxb4 ♘d5

13 ♗b2 (Lane has suggested 13 ♘xe5?! ♘xb4 14 ♘c3, but this leaves c5 weak and after 14...♘d3! 15 ♘xd3 0-0-0 Black is better since 16 ♘a4 ♗xd3 17 ♗d2 ♖d4 18 ♘b6+ ♔b7 continues to misplace White's pieces; 13 ♗d2 might be better, although it's not then so easy for White to develop his king's knight and 13...f6, followed by ...g6 or even ...g5, retains good compensation) 13...f6 14 ♘bd2 and now there was nothing wrong with the game's 14...♗e7 15 g3 ♗d3, but Black could also have played more adventurously with 14...g5!? 15 ♘c4 0-0-0; a combination of the ideas of ...♗d3, ...♘f4, and ...g4 with ...♗h6 will cause problems.

b) 5 ♘a3 is a solid and reasonable idea once Black has played ...e6, but without that move is pretty toothless: 5...cxd4 6 ♘b5 ♕d8 (sensible, but does White really have enough compensation after 6...♕e5+!? 7 ♗e2 dxc3 8 ♘f3 ♕b8 9 0-0 ♘f6?; S.Daniliuk-S.Abramov, Smolensk 1992, continued 10 ♖e1 cxb2 11 ♗xb2 e6 12 ♖c1 ♗b4 13 ♗e5?! ♘xe5 14 ♘c7+ ♔e7 15 ♘xe5 ♗a5! and White was struggling) 7 ♘f3 a6 (another ultra-safe move) 8 ♘bxd4 ♘xd4 9 ♕xd4 ♕xd4 10 ♘xd4 e5 11 ♘f3 f6

12 ♗c4 ♗c5 and Black had a comfortable position in D.Doncevic-M.Suba, Palma de Mallorca 1992.

c) 5 ♗e3 received some attention during the mid-nineties, but is another move which Black can highlight as being a little premature. He enjoys a pleasant choice with the critical option being 5...e5!? 6 c4 (6 dxc5?! ♕xd1+ 7 ♔xd1 ♘f6 was considered in variation 'a', above) 6...♕d8 7 d5 ♘d4 8 ♘c3 ♘f6 9 ♗d3 ♗d6 10 ♘ge2 0-0 which gave Black both a reasonable game and a most un-c3-Sicilian-like position in M.Wahls-J.Gallagher, Biel 1994. More

solid and common is 5...cxd4 6 cxd4 e5 7 ♘c3 ♗b4, reaching a position which often occurs with ♘f3 played instead of ♗e3. There 8 ♗d2 gives White good chances for an advantage, but in our position Black should be able to equalize quite easily:

8 ♘f3 (or 8 dxe5 when 8...♛xe5 is fine, but also possible is 8...♛a5!? 9 ♘f3 ♘ge7 10 ♕b3 0-0 11 ♗c4 b5! 12 ♗d3 ♗g4 and Black had unbalanced the position fairly successfully in G.Plunge-V.Malisauskas, Katowice 1995; likewise 8 a3 ♗xc3+ 9 bxc3 ♘ge7!? – rather than the equal 9...exd4 10 cxd4 ♘ge7 – 10 c4 ♛e4 11 ♘e2 ♘f5 12 d5 ♘cd4 posed White early problems in H.Richards-M.Carlsen, Lysaker 2002) 8...exd4 9 ♘xd4 ♘ge7! (again the best square for the king's knight, covering c6 and hoping to later come to f5; Black enjoys comfortable equality here since White lacks a good way to remove the active black queen from d5) 10 ♕d2 (10 ♘xc6 is perhaps a better equalizer, although Black might consider the 10...♗xc3+!? 11 bxc3 ♛xc6 12 ♕d4 0-0 13 ♕c5 ♘f5 of M.Boe Olsen-G.Henriksen, Danish League 1999) 10...♘xd4 11 ♗xd4 0-0 and Black was already slightly for preference in J.Palkovi-I.Almasi, Budapest 1995. Almasi's notes suggest that now White should have possibly tried 12 0-0-0!? ♗xc3 13 ♗xc3, offering the a-pawn for some unclear kingside prospects, whereas 12 ♘xd5 ♗xd2+ 13 ♔xd2 ♘xd5 14 ♖d1 ♖d8 leaves White's king a little misplaced.

Returning to the somewhat more important 5 ♘f3:

5...♗g4!?

This position is both less common and less theoretical than the related one with 4...♘f6 played instead of 4...♘c6, but it is also more forcing and dangerous. White must now respond in active vein should he wish to play for an advantage and we will chiefly consider:

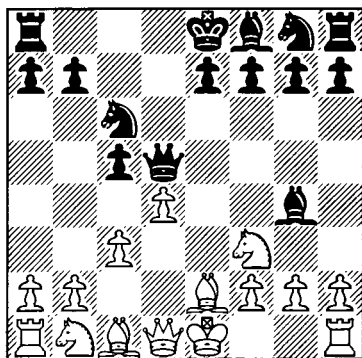
A1: 6 ♗e2
A2: 6 dxc5!?

The former remains the main line and was once considered to give White

an edge, but that is no longer so. Hence the dynamic latter has recently gained some attention, but it does allow Black to gain various advantages from his omission of an early ...♘f6.

The only other way to cover f3 is 6 ♘bd2?!, but after 6...cxd4 7 ♗c4 ♗xf3! White lacks a good capture: 8 ♗xd5 ♗xd1 9 ♔xd1 dxc3 10 bxc3 ♘f6 was effectively just an extra pawn for Black in K.Horvath-F.Lengyel, Debrecen 2001; the Fritzian 8 ♕xf3!? ♕xf3 9 ♘xf3 dxc3 10 bxc3 e6 11 ♖b1 comes up short after 11...a6!; and 8 ♕b3 ♕e5+ 9 ♔f1 ♗e2+!? 10 ♗xe2 ♕c7 11 ♘f3 e6 12 ♗f4 ♗d6 13 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 14 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 15 cxd4 ♘e7 saw Black play it safe and retain at least an edge in N.Vlassov-G.Tunik, Moscow 1996.

A1)

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 ♕xd5 4 d4 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 ♗g4 6 ♗e2

6...cxd4

Best. White now gains the c3-square for his queen's knight which is why this line was long out of favour, but that in itself grants Black some extra possibilities: ...♗b4, for instance, may become a good way to develop.

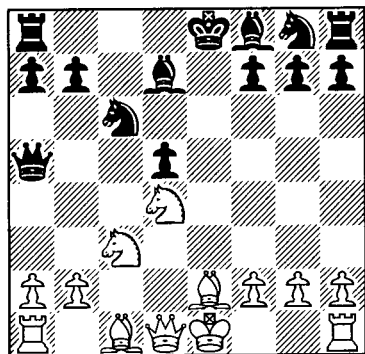
Another line which has received some attention in the past decade is 6...e6 7 h3 ♗h5 8 c4 ♕d6, but I remain unconvinced after 9 d5 ♗xf3 10 ♗xf3 ♘d4 11 0-0 e5. Against accurate white play this is about as good as things will get for Black since he lacks a good response to White's plan of opening the queenside.

7 cxd4 e6 8 h3

White usually inserts this useful move here or after 8 ♘c3 ♕a5. Forcing the bishop to h5 not only buys White some useful luft for later, but also gives him a few extra tactical opportunities. Of course, White doesn't have to play h3, but after 8 ♘c3 ♕a5 9 0-0 ♘f6 Black should simply continue as in Line A11 below; there is no important position in which the absence of h3 and ...♗h5 makes any difference to how Black should develop in these fairly quiet lines.

More critical after 8 ♘c3 ♕a5 is 9 d5!?, as in Line A12, and here the absence of h3 and ...♗h5 does make a difference in that after 9...exd5 (9...0-0-0 10 0-0 ♘f6?! is also much less effective since 11 ♘g5! strikes awkwardly at f7, F.Karpatchev-A.Zhaurov, Nizhnij Novgorod 1998, but quite possibly Black can get away with 10...exd5!?; this has only been tried twice, but appears playable if unsurprisingly risky and 11 ♘e5 ♗xe2 12 ♕xe2 ♘xe5 13 ♕xe5 ♘f6 14 ♗g5 ♗d6 15 ♕f5+ ♔b8 left White able to regain his pawn, but without gaining an advantage in P.Smirnov-V.Isupov, Novo-

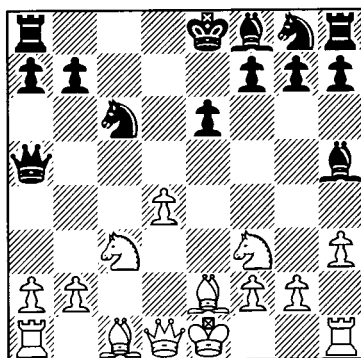
kuznetsk 1999) 10 ♘d4, 10...♘xd4 no longer convinces. Following 11 ♗xg4 White's light-squared bishop is better placed on g4 than h5 which enables him to gain the advantage with 11...♘c6 12 ♕xd5 (12 0-0!? ♘f6 13 ♗g5 ♗e7 14 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 15 ♘xd5 is a critical position with the bishop on h5 and may also be a good option; certainly 15...♗e5 16 b4 ♕d8 17 ♖e1 0-0 18 b5 ♗xa1 19 bxc6 sees the light-squared bishop making its presence immediately felt) 12...♕xd5 13 ♘xd5 ♖d8 14 ♘c7+ and now 14...♔d7 is illegal so Black is forced into 14...♔e7 when White has some advantage.

However, the absence of h3 and ...♗h5 gives Black another option after 9 d5 exd5 10 ♘d4, namely 10...♗d7! which appears to defuse White's gambit:

11 0-0 (11 ♘b3 ♕d8 12 ♘xd5 regains the pawn, but is completely equal after 12...♗e6; more ambitious is 12 ♕xd5 ♘f6 13 ♕g5, as in S.Paridar-I.Khamrakulova, Calvia Women's Olympiad 2004, when 13...♗b4 should be played since 14 ♕xg7 ♖g8 15 ♕h6 ♖xg2, and if 16 ♗g5 then 16...♘g8, is fine for Black) 11...♘xd4 12 ♕xd4 ♘f6 13 ♗g5 ♗e7 and White can't do anything more than regain his pawn with full equality, since 14 ♕e5 (14 ♖ad1 0-0 15 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 was unsurprisingly agreed drawn at this point in R.Ekstroem-Bu Xiangzhi, Bled Olympiad 2002, but Black might also play more ambitiously with 14...♗e6!?) 14...♗e6 15 ♗b5+ ♔f8 (Tzermiadianos) doesn't really give White quite enough compensation as Black is very solid here, has a useful move available in ...h6 and will aim to create some problems by activating his queen with ...♕b4.

8...♗h5 9 ♘c3

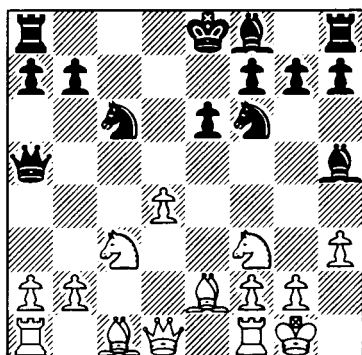
Another common move order is 9 0-0 ♘f6 10 ♘c3 ♕a5, reaching Line A11 and with White having lost his critical d4-d5 option.

9...♕a5

By far the safest square for the queen (both 9...♕d6 10 d5! and 9...♕d7 10 0-0 ♘f6 11 ♘e5! are a bit awkward) and we now reach both an important tabiya and a further divide.

White faces a critical choice be-

tween straightforward development and gambiting his d-pawn to seize the initiative:

A11: 10 0-0
A12: 10 d5!?

A11)
1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 ♕xd5 4 d4 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 ♗g4 6 ♗e2 cxd4 7 cxd4 e6 8 h3 ♗h5 9 ♘c3 ♕a5 10 0-0 ♘f6

Only now does Black develop his king's knight, and in a position in which White lacks an active and good option. Not everyone likes playing against an isolated queen's pawn (IQP) in general, but this is a pleasant version for Black, especially since White is unable to launch any sort of kingside attack.

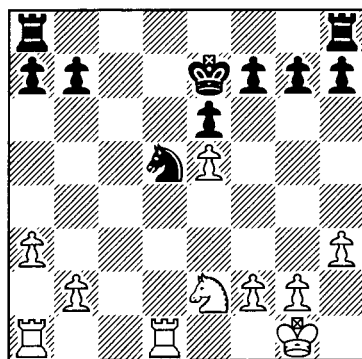
11 ♗e3

Not the most active of moves, but White's most popular choice. He has also tried:

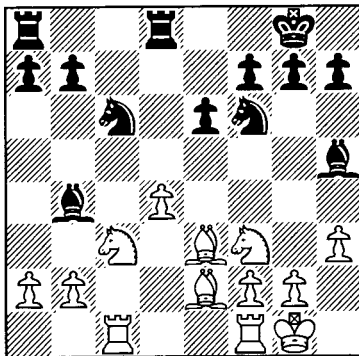
a) 11 a3 ♗d6! (just as in our main line, this is the best development of the king's bishop) 12 ♗e3 is another common route into our main line. Here there is also:

a1) 12 ♕b3? ♗xf3 13 ♗xf3 ♘xd4 is an important trick to note. White loses a pawn since 14 ♕xb7 ♖b8 15 b4 ♕e5 16 ♗c6+ ♔f8 wins material – another important reason for preferring to develop the bishop to d6 rather than e7.

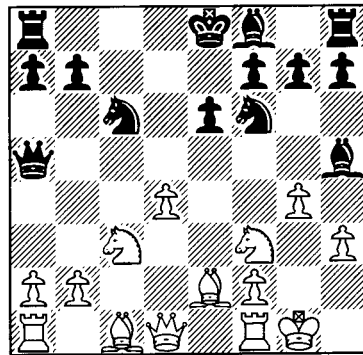
a2) 12 ♘b5 ♗b8 13 b4 ♕b6 is fine for Black since White will have to retreat his knight from b5.

a3) 12 ♗d2 ♕d8 13 ♗g5 is a more important alternative, but after 13...♗e7! (giving up the e5-square, but now White is forced into exchanges, whereas 13...h6 14 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 15 d5! exd5 16 ♘xd5 would have been less pleasant) 14 ♘e5 ♗xe2 15 ♘xe2 ♘xe5 16 dxe5 ♕xd1 17 ♖fxd1 ♘d5 18 ♗xe7 ♔xe7 Black had a very pleasant ending in C.Valiente-H.Hamdouchi, Yerevan Olympiad 1996.

Such endings are generally a little tricky for White since the d5-knight amply obstructs the d-file, while e5 can become weak. In the game Hamdouchi instructively doubled on the d-file, exchanged a pair of rooks, seized space

on the kingside and eventually e5 dropped off.

b) 11 Qb3 is well met by 11...Qb4!, angling for a very pleasant ending against the IQP as Black indeed gained after 12 Qxb4 (instead 12 Nb5 Rc8 13 g4 Bg6 14 Qd1?! saw White retain the queens, but not without enabling Black to develop and gain a good position after 14...a6 15 a3 Qa5 16 Nc3 Bd6 17 Be3 0-0 in J.Pisa Ferrer-B.Kurajica, San Sebastian 1993, and 12 Rd1 Rd8! 13 Be3 Qxb3 14 axb3 a6 15 g4 Bg6 16 Ne5 Nb4 17 Bf3 Nfd5 also saw White failing to make anything from his small lead in development in Y.Afek-V.Babula, Pardubice 1998) 12...Bxb4 13 Be3 (or 13 Bg5 Bxc3 14 Bxf6 gxf6 15 bxc3 Bxf3! 16 Bxf3 Rc8 17 Rfe1 Ke7 18 Rab1 b6 19 Be2 Na5 and again Black had the edge, although White managed to hold in N.Managadze-A.Tzermiadianos, Poros 1998) 13...0-0 14 Rac1 Rfd8

15 Rfd1 Rac8 in C.Tippleston-J.Emms, British Championship, Douglas 2005.

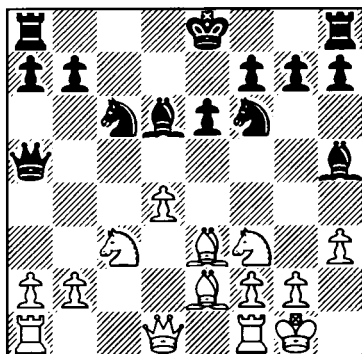
c) 11 Bf4 Rd8!? (the more solid 11...Be7 12 a3 0-0 13 g4 Bg6 14 Qb3 Qb6 15 Qxb6 axb6 is also fully playable; in J.Weidemann-S.Andresen, German League 1993, Black improved his light-squared bishop to retain control of the key d5-square with 16 Rad1 Bc2! 17 Rd2 Bb3) 12 Qb3 Qb4 is very similar to variation 'b', above. In R.Maullin-R.Palliser, York 2007, White tried the creative 13 g4 Bg6 14 Bb5!? a6 15 Bxc6+ bxc6 16 Be5, but after 16...c5! 17 Bxf6 gxf6 18 d5 c4 19 Qd1 Black could have gained the advantage in this rather murky position with the cold-blooded 19...Bc5 20 Nd4 Qxb2! 21 Qa4+ Kf8 22 Qxc4 Qb4.

d) 11 g4

is an advance White sometimes employs in the 4...Nf6 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 Be2 variation, but here it fails to impress; for example, 11...Bg6 12 Ne5 Bb4!? 13 Bb5 (or 13 Nxc6 bxc6 14 Qa4 Qxa4 15 Nxa4 Be4! 16 a3 Bd6 17 Nc3 Bd5 and Black had no problems whatsoever in S.Vajda-L.Vasilescu, Bucharest 2000) 13...Bxc3 14 Nc4 Qc7 15 bxc3 0-0 16 Ne3 Rfd8 17 Bb2 Ne4 left Black very solid and White's minor pieces not especially well coordinated in this hang-

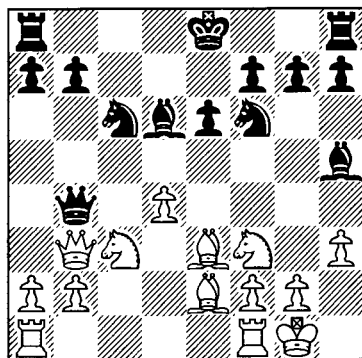
ing pawn position in S.Diaz Castro-M.Al Modiahki, Andorra 2003.

e) Finally, 11 ♘e5?! ♗xe2 12 ♘xc6?? is a horrendous mistake, forgetting all about the concept of the desperado: 12...♛xc3! 13 ♕xe2 ♛xc6 left White a clear piece in arrears in D.Rodriguez-Su.Polgar, Tunja 1989.

Returning to 11 ♗e3:

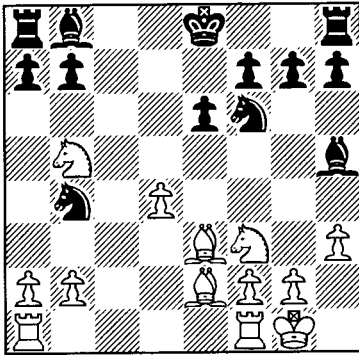
11...♗d6!

Not a standard development of the dark-squared bishop in IQP positions in general, but a good one in this particular case in which Black's queen and light-squared bishop are both actively deployed. Black wants to take control of the e5-square and may even, should White play too slowly, be able to re-route his c6-knight via e7 to d5, the ideal blockading square. Instead the less active 11...♗e7 is well met by 12 ♕b3 ♛b4 13 g4! ♗g6 14 ♘e5 0-0 15 g5! (S.Smagin-J.Armas, German League 1990).

12 a3

Either preparing b4 or facilitating ♕b3 without ...♛b4 being an awkward response. Indeed 12 ♕b3 ♛b4 is fine for Black:

a) 13 ♕xb4 only plays into Black's hands and 13...♘xb4 14 ♘b5 ♚e7 15 ♘xd6 ♚xd6 16 a3 (B.Hallengren-Y.Yarmolyuk, correspondence 2005) might even be met by 16...♗xf3!? 17 ♗xf3 ♘bd5, eliminating any possibility of ♘e5; Black is very comfortable here since White's bishops are rather passive.

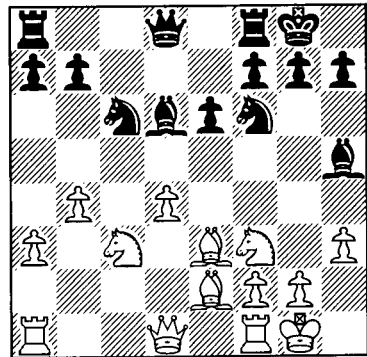
b) 13 ♖fd1 ♖d8!? (ambitious; 13...♛xb3 14 axb3 ♘d5 is a simpler way to equalize fully, S.Starovoit-E.Fedorcov, Kiev 1998) 14 g4 ♗g6 15 ♘e5 0-0! (Black shouldn't rush to remove the queens: 15...♛xb3?! 16 axb3 ♗c2 17 ♖dc1 ♗xb3 18 ♗b5 0-0 19 ♘xc6 bxc6 20 ♗xc6 ♗b8 21 ♘b5 was a little awkward in V.Ivanov-V.Isupov, Moscow 1995) 16 ♗f3 ♘a5 17 ♕xb4 ♗xb4 reached a roughly even queenless middlegame in O.Lemmers-G.Van Laatum, Belgian League 1997. Both sides can, though, play to win such an ending: White due to his temporary activity and strong e5-knight; Black through calmly continuing to make exchanges.

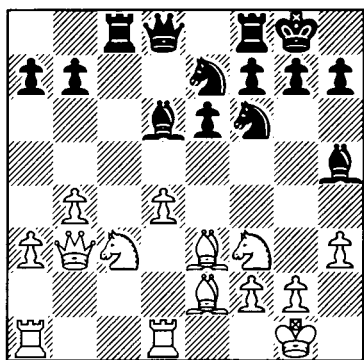
c) 13 ♘b5 ♗b8 (13...0-0!? might also be played; 14 ♘xd6 ♛xd6 15 ♖ac1 ♖ab8 16 ♖fd1 ♘d5 followed by ...♖fc8 is fine

for Black since White again struggles to get his dark-squared bishop into the game) 14 ♕xb4 (14 g4 ♗g6 15 ♘e5!? was a more ambitious try in T.Shaked-A.Miles, Groningen 1996, but with 15...♘d5 16 ♗f3 f6! 17 ♘xc6 ♕xb3 18 axb3 bxc6 19 ♖fc1 ♔d7 Black maintained the balance; observe here how Miles correctly avoided 15...♕xb3 16 axb3 ♘xe5? 17 dxe5 ♗xe5 due to 18 f4 – Gallagher – targeting Black's light-squared bishop and centralized king with a dangerous initiative) 14...♘xb4

15 ♖fc1 0-0 (the simplest; White won't be able to maintain his rook on the seventh and Black's additional knight is again in no way inferior to White's extra dark-squared bishop) 16 ♘c7 ♗xc7 17 ♖xc7 ♖ab8 18 ♖ac1 (18 ♖c4 can met by 18...♘bd5 or 18...♗xf3!? 19 ♗xf3 ♘fd5 20 a3 ♘c6 21 b4 ♖fd8 22 ♖ac1 h6 23 b5 ♘ce7 which shortly led to a draw, since neither side could easily make progress in Al.Karpov-V.Isupov, Prokojevsk 1998) 18...♘fd5 19 ♖7c4 ♘xa2! 20 ♖a1 ♘ab4 21 ♖xa7 f6 22 ♖c5 ♘c6 23 ♖a3 ♖fc8 was another roughly balanced but slightly more pleasant endgame for Black who went on to win in M.Nouro-A.Veingold, Tampere 1997.

d) 13 g4 ♗g6 14 ♕xb4 (the crucial difference with the dark-squared bishop being on e7 is that 14 ♘e5? now fails to 14...♘xd4! 15 ♗xd4 ♕xd4 when 16 ♕b5+ ♔f8 17 ♕xb7 ♖b8 leaves White in trouble down the b-file and also quite possibly on the kingside) 14...♘xb4 15 ♘b5 (15 ♘e5 ♘fd5 16 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 17 ♖ac1 ♗e4 18 ♘c4 ♗c7 19 ♘d2 ♗g6 20 ♗f3 ♔d7 21 ♘c4 f6! 22 ♘d2 h5! saw Black instructively beginning to demonstrate some of the drawbacks to g4 in S.Huguet-J.Oms Pallise, Andorra 2003) 15...♔e7! (with the queens off White lacks any real way to target the well-centralized black king) 16 ♘xd6 ♔xd6 17 ♘e5 ♘fd5 18 a3 ♘c6 19 ♘xc6 ♔xc6 gave Black another comfortable endgame in F.Jenni-D.Breder, Mureck 1998.

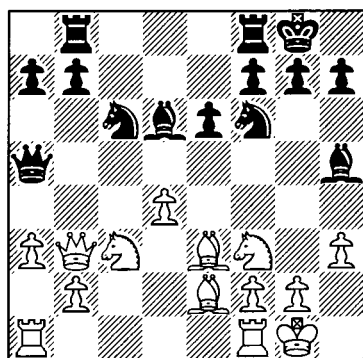
12...0-0 13 ♕b3

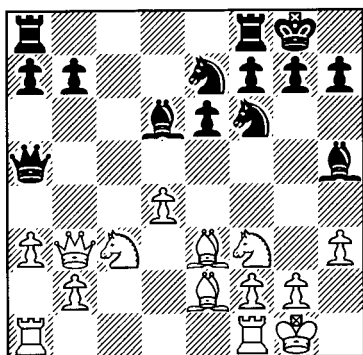
A fair amount of testing has shown that seizing space with 13 b4 doesn't give White any advantage after 13...♕d8 and then:

a) 14 ♘a4 ♘d5 15 ♕d2 ♕e8!? (forcing the pace and beginning an instructive sequence) 16 ♘c5 b6 17 ♘e4 ♗b8 18 ♖ac1 ♘ce7! 19 ♘e5 (now Black forces some favourable exchanges, but White lacked an active alternative) 19...f5! 20 ♗xh5 ♕xh5 21 ♘g3 ♕e8 22 ♘e2 ♗xe5! 23 dxe5 was A.Tzermiadianos-S.Atalik, Greek Team Championship 1996, and now I like Atalik's suggestion of 23...h6!?; Black's outpost on d5 gives him good control over the position and he will play to expand on the kingside.

b) 14 ♕b3 (a more common try, although perhaps Black might now consider striking against White's queenside expansion with the untested 14...a5!?) 14...♖c8 15 ♖fd1 (15 ♖ad1 ♘e7 16 ♖c1 ♘fd5 17 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 18 ♖xc8 ♕xc8 19 ♖c1 ♕d8 was also pretty comfortable for Isupov in M.Turov-V.Isupov, Moscow 1994) 15...♘e7

16 ♗g5! (finally White finds a way to put his dark-squared bishop to good use; Black must now also accept a structural concession) 16...♘fd5 17 ♘xd5 exd5 18 ♖ac1 f6 19 ♗d2 ♖xc1 20 ♖xc1 ♕b6 was pretty even in A.Bayev-V.Isupov, Novosibirsk 1999. Black can, though, try and make progress in such a doubled IQP position: ...♗b8 and ...♕d6 is one option, and he would also like to reach an endgame with good knight against bad bishop.

c) 14 ♕d2 (a slightly planless move; compared with 14 ♕b3, the queen doesn't support White's advanced queenside) 14...♖c8 15 ♖ac1?! a5! 16 b5 ♘e7 weakened White's queenside and gave Black a pleasant edge in J.Saunders-R.Palliser, British League 2007.

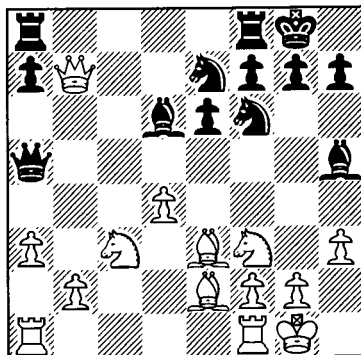
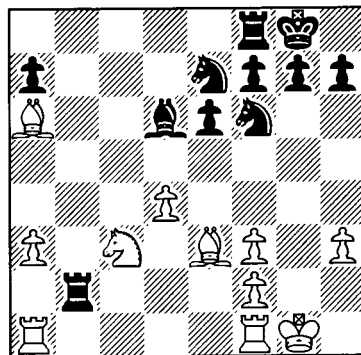
13...♘e7!?

Immediately improving the knight, but the solid 13...♖ab8 is a good alternative.

After 14 ♖fd1 (14 ♘b5 ♕d8 15 ♘xd6 ♕xd6 16 ♖fd1 ♘d5 17 ♖ac1 ♘ce7 was fine for Black in L.Vajda-D.Breder, Pardubice 1999) 14...♖fd8 15 ♕b5 (15 ♖ac1 is more usual and probably better when Black has a choice between Ni Hua's prophylactic 15...h6!?, playing for exchanges with 15...♘d5, and simply doubling rooks with 15...♖d7 16

♖d2 ♖bd8, as in D.Zifroni-A.Abolianin, Antwerp 1995, with an equal game in all cases) 15...♕xb5 16 ♘xb5 ♘d5 17 ♘xd6 ♖xd6 18 ♔f1 f6 19 ♖ac1 ♖bd8 White was ground down in S.Brady-L.D.Nisipeanu, Saint Vincent 2004. White's problem in such an ending is that he is rather passive and the future European Champion gave a good demonstration of how to make progress as Black: 20 g4 ♗e8! 21 ♘d2 ♘ce7 22 ♘e4 ♖c6 23 ♖xc6 ♗xc6 24 ♘c3 ♔f7 25 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 26 ♗d3 g5! 27 ♔e2 ♖h8 28 ♗e4 h5 29 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 30 ♖g1 a5 and White was being squeezed.

14 ♕xb7?!

Black is happy to see this, but the alternatives also fail to bring White any advantage:

a) 14 ♗d2 ♕b6 15 ♕xb6 axb6 16 ♖ac1 saw c3 Sicilian expert, John Shaw, obtain a comfortable draw in T.Thorhallsson-J.Shaw, European Team Championship, Plovdiv 2003; Black's control of d5 fully offsets his doubled b-pawns.

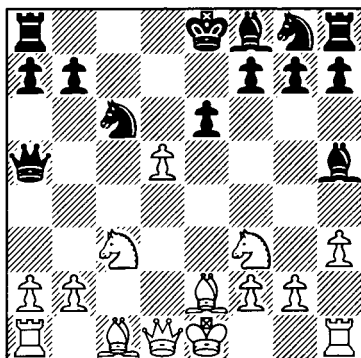
b) 14 ♘b5 ♗b8 15 ♖ac1 ♘fd5 16 ♗d1 a6 17 ♘c3 ♘xe3!? 18 fxe3 ♘f5 19 ♘e4 ♕d5 was an interesting and pretty reasonable way to unbalance the position in O.Aktunc-A.Gilimshin, correspondence 2003.

14...♖ab8 15 ♕a6 ♕xa6 16 ♗xa6 ♗xf3 17 gxf3 ♖xb2

Black's superior structure grants him an excellent game here. In N.Benmesbah-Zhao Jun, Shenzhen 2005, White was able to exchange his knight on d6, but after that his bishop-pair was no match for Black's knights.

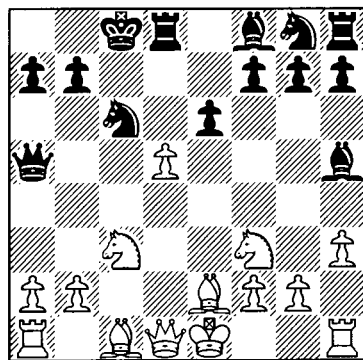
This variation is pretty comfortable for Black and not particularly hard to handle: he develops in straightforward style and chiefly just needs to remem-

ber to prefer ...♗d6 over ...♗e7 and to meet ♕b3 with, where possible, ...♕b4. Unsurprisingly the leading c3 Sicilian experts have now turned to sharper and more unbalancing methods against 4...♘c6 5 ♘f3 ♗g4.

A12)

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 ♕xd5 4 d4 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 ♗g4 6 ♗e2 cxd4 7 cxd4 e6 8 h3 ♗h5 9 ♘c3 ♕a5 10 d5!?

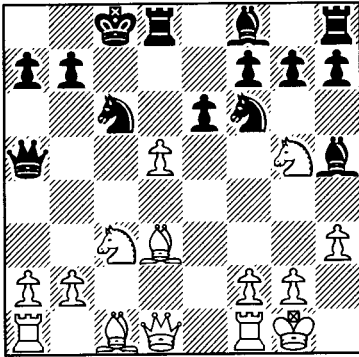
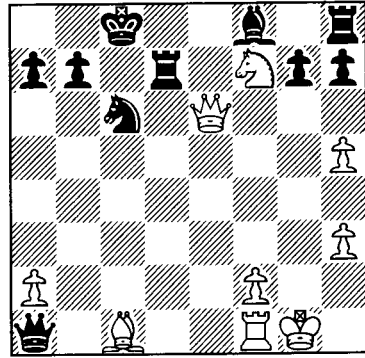
A critical pawn sacrifice, although my own praxis with 5...♗g4 suggests that a number of quite regular c3 exponents either remain unaware of this gambit or simply don't like to play a pawn down for a period of time, as White must be prepared to here. However, there is no doubt that this gambit is quite dangerous. Black doesn't need much concrete knowledge to get by in A11, but here he is advised to make sure he is well prepared.

10...exd5

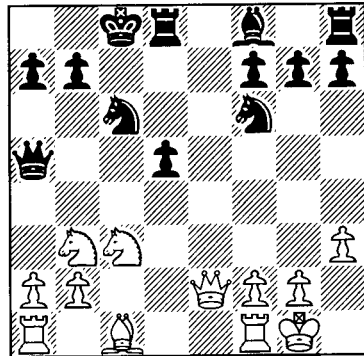
A rare alternative which should especially appeal to those who like to undertake some analysis of their own is the sharp 10...0-0-0!?. White then has:

a) 11 0-0 has been by far the commonest response, but may well not be up to the rigorous demands of the position. After 11...♘f6 we reach another divide:

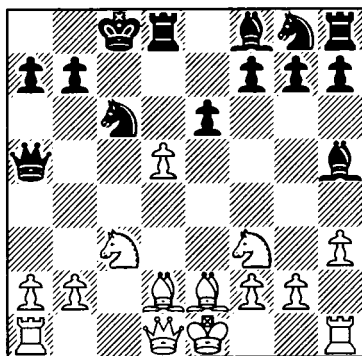
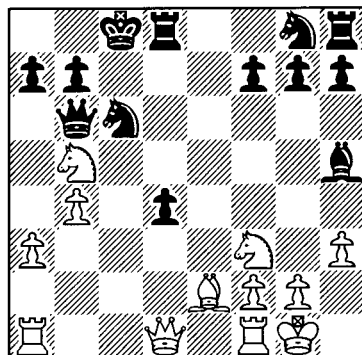
a1) 12 ♘d4 ♗xe2 13 ♘xc6 ♗xd1! 14 ♘xa5 ♗b4 was very comfortable for Black in V.Milanovic-P.Genov, Yugoslavia 2001, although White should be able to equalize with 15 ♘xd1 ♗xa5 16 dxe6 fxe6 17 ♗e3 (Milanovic).

a2) 12 ♗g5 ♗e7 13 ♘e5? is misguided and 13...♘xe5 14 ♗xh5 ♘xd5 15 ♗d2 g6 16 ♗e2 ♘xc3 left White pretty much just a clear pawn in arrears in F.Castaldo-J.Sanchez, Bratto 2004.

a3) 12 dxc6?! ♖xd1 13 cxb7+ ♔xb7 14 ♖xd1 is a radical attempt, but not a wholly convincing idea despite Black's slightly exposed king. Best is probably 14...♗c5! followed by ...♖c8 (or 15...♖d8 in the case of 15 ♗d2), whereas 14...♗b4 15 ♗d2 ♖d8 16 a3 ♗xc3?! 17 ♗xc3 ♖xd1+ 18 ♖xd1 ♕c7 19 ♖d4 gave White plenty of activity and sufficient compensation for the queen in T.Michalczak-H.Ackermann, German League 2006.

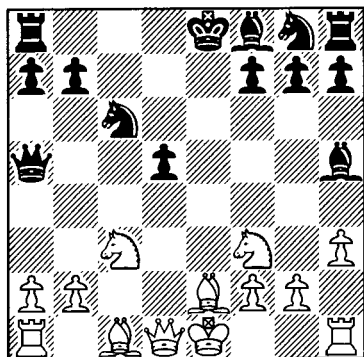
a4) 12 ♘g5!? ♗g6 13 ♗d3 (S.Yudin-O.Loskutov, Tomsk 2004) attempts to pressurize f7, but can be defused by an excellent idea of Rogozenko's, namely 13...♗h5!.

Now 14 ♗e2 repeats, but 14 g4 is more critical when 14...♘xd5 15 gxh5 (15 ♘xd5?! ♛xd5 16 gxh5 ♛xd3 17 ♛xd3 ♜xd3 18 ♘xf7 ♜g8 leaves both White's advanced knight and vulnerable h-pawns in some trouble) 15...♘xc3 16 bxc3 (the sharpest option; Rogozenko's initial analysis only mentioned 16 ♛c2 ♘d5 17 ♘xf7 ♜d7! when Black's activity and White's wrecked kingside supply good compensation for the exchange: one possible continuation is 18 ♘xh8 ♘db4 19 ♗d2 ♘xc2 20 ♗xa5 ♜xd3 21 ♜ac1 ♘2d4 and Black's compensation persists even after the exchange of queens) 16...♛xc3 regains the piece. Throughout this variation White should strive to play as actively as possible and so he should continue here with 17 ♘xf7! ♜xd3 18 ♛g4 when 18...♛xa1 (18...♗c5!? 19 ♛xe6+ ♜d7 is a brave attempt to continue) 19 ♛xe6+ ♜d7

20 ♛e8+! (forcing and best, whereas 20 ♜d1?! ♘d4 21 ♛e8+ ♚c7 22 ♗f4+ ♗d6 23 ♛xd7+ ♚xd7 24 ♜xa1 ♜f8! gives Black the better ending) 20...♘d8 21 ♘xd8 ♜xd8 (21...♜e7?! 22 ♛a4 ♛e5 23 ♜d1 is extremely dangerous for Black and even 21...♗e7!? 22 ♛xh8 ♜xd8 23 ♛xh7 ♛e5 doesn't appear to bring Black any advantage after 24 ♗e3 ♗d6 25 ♜c1+ ♚b8 26 ♚f1) 22 ♛e6+ ♜d7 23 ♛e8+ forces a repetition.

b) 11 ♘d2!? is a suggestion of Joel Benjamin's, the man who invented White's d5 gambit. His analysis runs 11...♗xe2 12 ♛xe2 exd5 13 0-0 ♘f6 14 ♘b3

14...♕c7 (this is by no means forced and in the only outing for 11 ♘d2 which I could find Black preferred 14...♕b4!?; I quite like this and following 15 ♗d2?! ♕c4 16 ♕f3 d4! 17 ♘e2 d3 18 ♘f4 ♕e4 Black had gained some advantage in E.Rodriguez Martin-M.Monteiro, correspondence 1995) 15 ♗g5 ♗e7 16 ♖ac1 when White clearly has compensation, although after 16...a6 I'm by no means certain that Black is worse. Quite possibly White only has enough initiative to regain his pawn when equality ensues, but this could really do with some tests.

c) Interestingly Rogozenko feels that 11 ♘d2 is 'dubious', proposing instead another virtually untested move in 11 ♗d2!?.

He then gives 11...exd5 12 0-0 ♘f6 13 ♖c1 when White has some initiative, especially since Black must avoid 13...♔b8? 14 ♘b5! and 15 ♗f4+. However, 12...d4!? looks like an improvement when 13 ♘b5!? (13 ♘e4 ♗b4 14 ♗g5 ♘f6 sees Black catch up in development with the point that 15 ♘xf6 is met by 15...♗xf3! 16 ♗xf3 ♕xg5) 13...♗b4 (13...♕b6?! 14 ♕b3! ♘f6 15 a4 gives White a strong attack) 14 ♗xb4 ♕xb4 15 a3 ♕a5 16 b4 ♕b6

17 a4!? (continuing in bold and critical vein; instead the sacrificial 17 ♘fxd4 ♗xe2 18 ♕xe2 ♘xd4 19 ♖ac1+ ♘c6 20 ♕g4+ ♔b8 21 ♕g3+ ♔c8 leads to perpetual) 17...♗xf3! (trying to deflect one of the defenders of the b5-knight and preparing to meet 18 gxf3!? with 18...♖d5; unfortunately for Black the tempting alternative 17...d3 18 ♗xd3 ♗g6? fails to 19 a5) 18 ♗xf3 ♘ge7 19 ♖e1 ♔b8 remains rather unclear. White undoubtedly has quite strong queenside pressure, but Black remains fairly solid and retains his extra pawn. He would like to defend with ...♘d5 or ...♖d7 and ...♕d8, and if White tries to defend his knight with 20 ♕d3 then 20...♘xb4 21 ♕b3 ♘ed5 is possible.

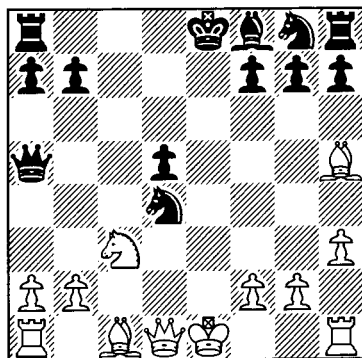
Thus it appears that the very sharp 10...0-0-0!? is quite playable, although those intending to adopt it would do well to both analyse further and keep an eye out for recent games in the critical variations 'a4' and 'c'.

Returning to the main line,

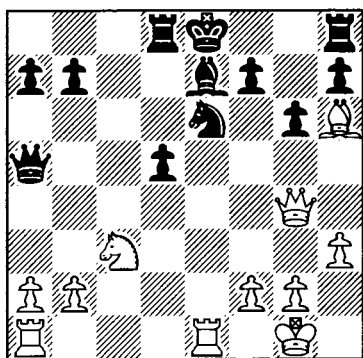
10...exd5:

11 ♘d4

The gambit follow-up, but some readers may be more concerned by 11 ♛xd5, especially should they be up against weaker opposition. I could only find one example of this cowardly approach on my database, albeit in a game agreed drawn on the next move. However, there Black rejected the logical 11...♛xd5 12 ♘xd5 0-0-0! (Collins) which I believe to be his best. Play might continue 13 ♘c3 (13 ♘f4 ♗xf3 14 ♗xf3 ♗b4+ also unbalances the position by forcing White to move his king) 13...♗b4 14 0-0 ♘f6 15 ♗e3 ♖he8 and I slightly prefer Black. White should probably be able to maintain equality, but Black has the more pleasant position with the better-placed rooks and ideas of ...♗xc3 followed by ...♘d5. A weaker opponent could certainly be made to suffer for a long time as White here.

11...♗xe2

Accepting the pawn sacrifice. A major alternative is 11...♘xd4 12 ♗xh5 and then:

a) Mchledlishvili's 12...♘c6 was heavily praised by both Rowson (on ChessPublishing) and Collins (in his *Chess Explained: The c3 Sicilian*) after the game E.Najer-J.Lautier, Khanty Mansyisk 2005, but I'm afraid that I can't recommend this attempt to return the pawn. After 13 0-0 ♘f6 14 ♗g5 ♗e7 15 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 16 ♘xd5 ♗e5, rather than Najer's 17 ♛b3, more critical must be 17 b4!, a move which I first analysed on the ChessPublishing Forum and which looks rather dangerous: 17...♛d8 18 ♖e1 (David Eggleston's idea of 18 b5!? might be even better, especially since 18...♘d4 19 ♗xf7+! ♔xf7 20 ♛h5+ ♔e6 21 ♖ae1 ♛xd5 22 f4 yields a huge attack) 18...0-0 19 b5 ♗xa1 20 bxc6 ♗f6 21 c7! ♛d6 22 ♗g4 and at the end of this fairly forced sequence White appears to be doing pretty well. Even 23 ♖e6 is on the cards and I haven't been able to find a satisfactory way for Black to free his position.

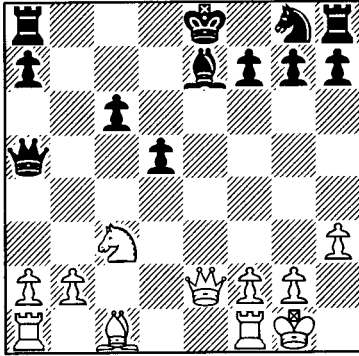
b) It may well be the case, however, that it is the modern 12...♘c6 rather than 11...♘xd4 which is suspect. Indeed the older retreat to e6 looks like a

reasonable and safer alternative to our main line. Play usually continues 12...♘e6 13 0-0 (13 ♕xd5 ♕xd5 14 ♘xd5 ♖d8 15 ♘c3 ♘f6 16 ♗d1 ♗b4 gives Black enough activity to offset White's bishop-pair) 13...♘f6 14 ♖e1 (with a threat which Black must parry) 14...g6 15 ♗g4 ♘xg4 16 ♕xg4 and now Black must find (or remember) the accurate 16...♗e7! (16...♕b4?! 17 ♗f4! only helps White; both ♖xe6 and ♕f3 followed by ♗e5 are on the agenda) when Benjamin's original analysis continued 17 ♗h6 (the only critical try since 17 ♗g5 ♗xg5 18 ♕xg5 0-0 gets Black's king to safety with full equality and 17 ♖xe6?! fxe6 18 ♕xe6 ♕a6 19 ♕e5 ♕f6 20 ♕xd5 ♕c6 21 ♕e5 ♔f7 wasn't a fully convincing exchange sacrifice in S.Sivokho-R.Altshul, St Petersburg 1999) 17...♖d8 (probably best and instead 17...d4 18 ♘e2 ♕f5 19 ♕xf5 gxf5 20 ♘g3 ♖d8 21 ♘xf5 ♖d5 22 g4! was a little better for White in Z.Hracek-V.Georgiev, Krynica 1998)

18 ♖xe6!? (White has also tried 18 ♖e5, but after 18...♕b4 Black should be fine if the queens come off and 19 ♕e2 ♕c4 20 ♕d2 d4 21 ♘b5?! ♖d5 22 ♖xd5 ♕xd5 was more than OK for Black in S.Paridar-M.Amanov, Abu Dhabi 2005; 21 ♘e4 improves, although then 21...♖d5! 22 ♖c1 ♕xa2 23 ♖xd5 ♕xd5 24 ♖c8+ ♘d8 25 ♗g7 ♕xe4!? 26 ♗xh8 f6, a promising exchange sacrifice, is but one reasonable way for Black to handle the position) 18...fxe6 19 ♖e1 which he assessed as being clearly better for White. I began to doubt that assessment when I saw that the position after 18 ♖xe6 was agreed drawn in E.Ghaem Maghami-Ni Hua, Calcutta 2004, if only because the Chinese grandmaster is usually very well prepared, while the Iranian has himself employed this 5...♗g4 variation. Of course, the position still had to be analysed, but after examining 19...♖d6 20 ♖xe6 (20 ♗f4 ♖c6 21 ♖xe6 ♖xe6 22 ♕xe6 ♕b6 23 ♕xd5 ♖f8 isn't an improvement for White) 20...♖xe6 21 ♕xe6 ♕a6! 22 ♕xd5 (22 ♕e5 ♕f6 23 ♕xd5 gives Black the extra option of 23...g5!? as well as 23...♕c6) 22...♕c6 23 ♕e5 ♕f6 I wasn't able to prove any advantage for White. He has good compensation for the exchange, but by giving up a queenside pawn Black should be able to untangle with ...♔f7.

Returning to the more ambitious 11...♗xe2:

12 ♕xe2+ ♗e7 13 ♘xc6 bxc6 14 0-0

A critical position. Undoubtedly White has compensation for his pawn, not least because he has the easier position to play. Black, for his part, must aim to slowly unravel his kingside and needs to be careful that White can't

easily exploit his queenside weaknesses. I believe that the black position is fully playable, but, of course, it won't suit everyone. Hence the alternatives given in the notes to Black's 10th and 11th moves.

14...♖d8!?

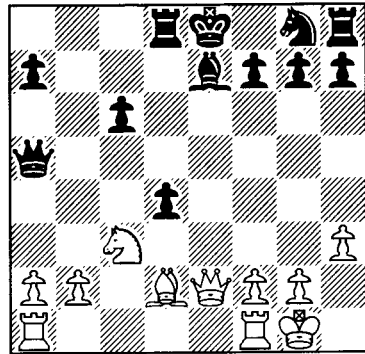
A useful, semi-active move. Black may well want to cover e7 with ...♖d7 and he also has ideas of disrupting White's build-up with an advance of the d-pawn. Instead 14...♘f6 15 ♗g5 ♔f8 16 ♖fe1 is quite pleasant for White; Black will struggle to both free his position and keep his queenside under control after 17 ♖ac1. The other option is 14...♔f8, giving up castling rights, but hoping to unravel with ...♕d8, ...g6 and ...♔g7.

15 ♗d2

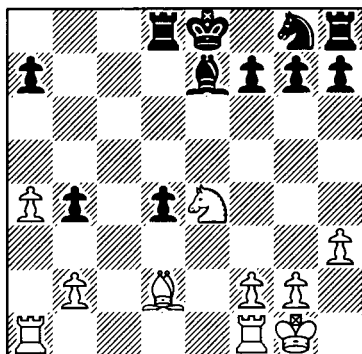
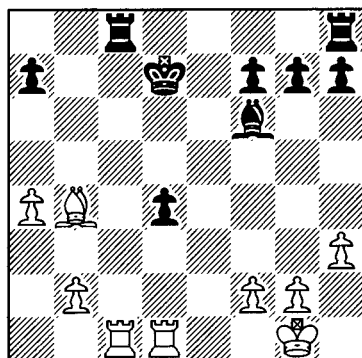
White's most popular move, but as Black isn't troubled by discovered attacks against his queen, it may not be the most testing. Alternatively:

a) 15 ♗g5 d4! 16 ♗xe7 ♘xe7 17 ♖fe1 0-0 (the more risky 17...♕g5!? 18 ♘e4 ♕e5 can also be considered) 18 ♕xe7 dxc3 19 bxc3 ♖d2 reveals one of the ideas behind 14...♖d8; Black has full equality here.

b) 15 ♖e1!? prevents Black from castling, after which 15...d4!? (15...♖d7?! 16 ♕g4! is awkward) 16 ♘e4 ♔f8 is far from clear; for example, 17 ♗d2 ♕b6 (unlike 17...♕d5, this wisely prevents 18 ♕a6) 18 ♖ac1 ♘f6 19 ♘xf6 ♗xf6 20 ♕d3 ♔g8 and White's compensation persists, despite the exchange of pieces, although Black should be OK here, having avoided the threat of 21 ♕a3+ and 22 ♗a5.

15...d4

Once again Black makes good use of his d-pawn. Now 16 b4 ♕f5 17 ♘e4 ♘f6 18 ♘xf6+ (18 ♘g3 ♕d5 19 ♖fe1 ♖d7 also enables Black to castle) 18...♕xf6 19 ♖fe1 ♖d7 20 ♕g4 h5 21 ♕d1 g6 22 ♖c1 0-0 saw Black realize his goals and left White worse in P.Pisk-A.Motylev, Ubeda 2000.

It has thus been suggested that White should prefer an immediate 16 ♘e4, after which 16...♕b5!? 17 ♕xb5 (playing to open the queenside; White might also try 17 ♕f3!? when 17...♕d5! continues to tie down the white forces)

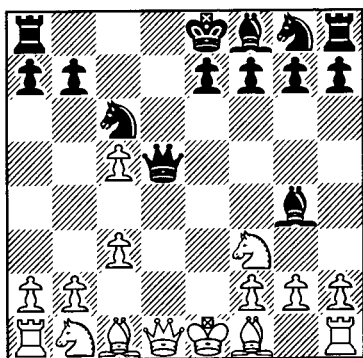
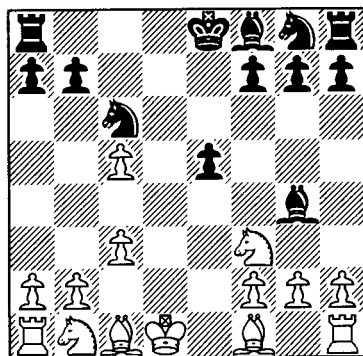
17...cxb5 18 a4 was seen in S.Vysochin-J.Shaw, Cappelle la Grande 2003. Shaw now captured on a4 which allowed White some activity and probably the advantage, although notably Black was later able to gain good counterplay by making use of his passed d-pawn. However, I'm not certain why 18...b4!?, as suggested by Markovic, isn't possible, especially since Black is happy to return a pawn to fully unravel.

Play might continue 19 ♖ac1 (19 ♖fe1!? retains more tension, but 19...♖d5 20 ♖ac1 ♔d8 keeps everything covered, such as with 21 ♗f4 ♘f6 22 ♘g5 ♖f8 23 ♖c7 ♖d7 and, just like after 19 ♖ac1, White can regain his pawn on d4 with equality, but no more; here 21 ♖c6 is also possible, but then 21...♘f6 22 ♘g5 ♖f8 23 ♖ec1 ♘e8 covers c7 while also attacking the g5-knight) 19...♘f6 20 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 21 ♗xb4 (or 21 ♖c7 ♖d7 22 ♖fc1!? ♖xc7 23 ♖xc7 a5 24 ♖c8+ ♗d8 and White can do no more than regain the pawn on d4, at the cost of allowing Black to active his centralized king) 21...♔d7 22 ♖fd1 (trying to round-up the d-pawn; 22 ♗c5 a6 23 b4 ♔e6 is also fine for Black) 22...♖c8

23 ♖c5 (23 ♗c5 ♔e6 saves the d-pawn) 23...♖c7 24 ♖d5+ ♔e6!? 25 ♖d6+ ♔f5 26 g4+ ♔e4 27 ♖e1+ ♔d3 and White lacks the resources to continue hunting down Black's king. Indeed if anything he must be careful here with ...♔c2-b3 one possibility. Quite possibly White shouldn't chase the king down the board, but in any case he can't win d4 and doesn't have any advantage in this ending.

Much remains to be discovered after the critical 10 d5!?, but for now Black is holding his own in a number of key positions: as well as our main line, both 10...0-0-0!? and 11...♘xd4 followed by 12...♘c6 deserve serious consideration.

A2)

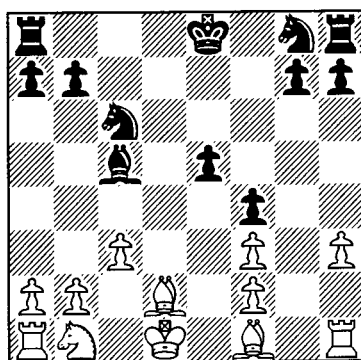
1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 ♕xd5 4 d4 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 ♗g4 6 dxc5!?

Like so many lines of the c3 Sicilian, this unbalancing capture only began to receive attention once it was tried by Sveshnikov. It certainly leads to some interesting and unusual positions, but

despite having been endorsed by both Rozentalis and Harley's *Play the 2 c3 Sicilian* and Collins' *An Attacking Repertoire for White*, I'm not convinced. Indeed the Sicilian player should be quite happy to see this variation since, so long as Black doesn't recapture on c5, a dynamic and complex situation quickly ensues.

6...♛xd1+! 7 ♔xd1 e5

Already we can see some important differences from the also fairly fashionable 4...♘f6 5 ♘f3 ♗g4 6 dxc5 variation: not only can Black castle more quickly, but he is able to meet 8 ♗e3 with an advance of the unimpeded f-pawn.

8 b4

The consistent follow-up. White cannot allow Black to regain the pawn when his superior development and ability to castle gives him an easy game; for example, 8 ♔e1?! ♗xc5 9 ♘bd2 ♘f6 10 ♘g5 and now in R.Dworzynski-H.Szapiel, Katowice 1952 (quite possibly the stem game for this variation), the prophylactic 10...♗e7!? would have left Black with a small edge.

White can defend c5 with 8 ♗e3, but after 8...f5! 9 h3 (or 9 ♗b5 f4 10 ♗d2 ♗xc5 11 ♖e1 0-0-0 12 ♗xc6 bxc6 13 ♖xe5 ♗xf2 14 ♔e2 ♗b6 and although I later overpressed in N.Thomas-R.Palliser, British Championship, Swansea 2006, Black could certainly have no complaints with his active position at this point, while 9...0-0-0+!? might be even more precise) 9...♗xf3+ 10 gxf3 f4 11 ♗d2 ♗xc5 it is not especially easy for White to complete his development.

Indeed previous annotators have suggested that Black is doing quite well here. He should most certainly not

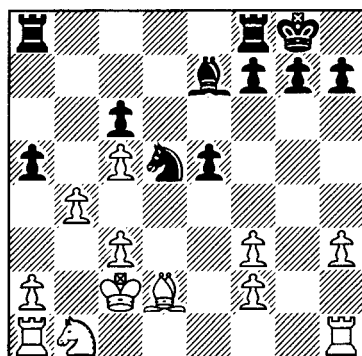
be unhappy, but after the solid 12 ♗e1! (12 ♖g1 g6 13 ♗b5 ♘ge7 14 ♔e2 0-0-0 15 b4 ♗b6 16 a4 ♘f5 17 a5 ♗c7 18 ♗xc6 bxc6 19 ♘a3 ♖he8 followed by ...e4 gave Black a typical attack for this variation in J.Pitkanen-T.Nyback, Lahti 1998) 12...0-0-0+ 13 ♘d2 White may well not be worse, despite the grim position of the e1-bishop. M.Ragger-J.Markus, Vienna 2005, continued 13...e4!? (13...♘f6 14 ♔c2 ♖he8 15 ♗d3 keeps control of the e4-square) 14 fxe4 ♘f6 15 ♔c2 ♖he8 16 ♖d1 g5 17 f3 ♘e5 when Black's bind and pressure gave him full compensation for the pawn.

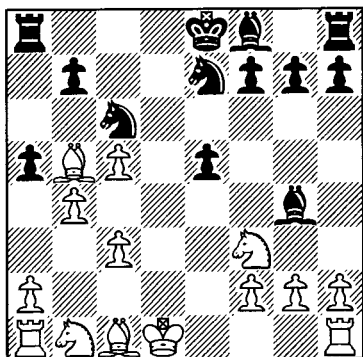
8...a5

Increasing the tension on the queenside. This is much harder for White to handle than the immediate 8...e4?! when 9 h3 ♗xf3+ (9...♗h5 10 g4 also favours White) 10 gxf3 exf3 11 ♔c2 sees White taking over the initiative.

9 ♗b5

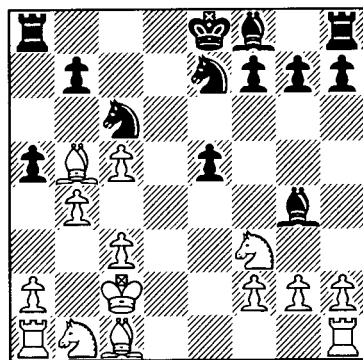
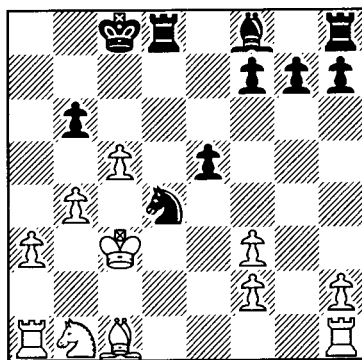
Saving the pawn through development is both natural and White's main move, whereas 9 b5 ♘d8 followed by ...♘e6 sees Black regain the pawn with a good game. White can try to make a c6-advance work, but 10 ♗e2 f6 11 ♗e3 ♖c8 (heading straight for d5 with 11...♘e7!? is also tempting) 12 c6 bxc6 13 b6 ♘e7 14 ♘bd2 ♘d5 15 ♔c2 ♖b8, for example, didn't impress in F.Robidas-F.Caire, Montreal 2004; Black is once again very active and the b6-pawn much more of a weakness than an asset.

Another option for White is 9 ♗d2!?, as essayed in J.Emms-A.Kuzmin, Port Erin 2003. Notably Emms later employed 5...♗g4 as Black, quite possibly because he wasn't happy with his position after 9...♘f6 (developing and ruling out 10 ♗b5? due to 10...e4! 11 h3 ♗h5 12 g4 ♘xg4 13 hxg4 ♗xg4 and the typical trick sees Black recoup his material with some interest) 10 h3 ♗xf3+ 11 gxf3 ♗e7 12 ♗b5 0-0 (Black often castles long in this variation, but here he wouldn't gain a tempo down the d-file and it is useful for him to maintain some pressure down the a-file) 13 ♗xc6 (Kuzmin points out that White had to avoid 13 ♔c2?! due to 13...axb4 14 ♗xc6 b3+!, splitting the white queenside) 13...bxc6 14 ♔c2 ♘d5

15 a3?! (Kuzmin's *Informant* notes propose 15 ♔b3!? as an improvement, not that Black should be worse after 15...♖fd8 16 ♔c4 ♘c7!? when, for example, 17 a4 axb4 18 cxb4 ♖d4+ 19 ♔b3 ♖d3+ 20 ♗c3 ♗f6 is still rather unclear, although the white position remains hard to coordinate) 15...♖fb8 16 ♖e1 ♔f8! and with White completely tied up – observe how hard it is to develop the knight from b1 – Kuzmin was able to improve his position almost at his leisure, beginning with ...g6 and ...f5.

9...♘ge7!

Preparing to recapture on c6 with the knight and thereby nullifying much of the effect of White's last. Instead 9...e4!? has been rarely seen, but may not be so bad; certainly 10 ♗xc6+ bxc6 11 h3 0-0-0+ 12 ♗d2 exf3 13 hxg4 fxg2 14 ♖g1 (I.Dolgov-A.Kazoks, correspondence 2005) 14...h5! gives Black counterplay in a manner similar to our main line.

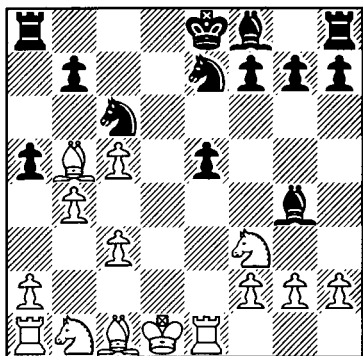
10 a3

Wisely shoring up b4. The alternatives are rather risky for White:

a) 10 ♔c2 has been White's main alternative.

E.Sveshnikov-V.Priehoda, Bled 1997, continued 10...♗xf3 11 gxf3 axb4 12 ♖d1?!, but now Rozentalis and Harley's suggestion of 12...bxc3 13 ♘xc3 ♘f5 would already have left the great c3 Sicilian expert worse due to the weakness of d4 and c5, especially since 14 ♘d5? fails to 14...♘fd4+ 15 ♖xd4 exd4 16 ♘c7+ ♔d7 17 ♘xa8 ♗xc5 when Black regains his piece with an extra pawn. Going back, it may well be the case that it was White's 12th, not 10th as previously thought, which was his error. Instead 12 cxb4 0-0-0 13 ♗xc6 ♘xc6 14 a3 (or 14 ♗d2 when Black can simply check and capture on f3 or follow S.Zhigalko-B.Predojevic, Oropesa del Mar 2001: 14...b6!? 15 cxb6 ♘xb4+ 16 ♔b3 ♖d3+ 17 ♗c3 ♔b7 18 f4 and now Black should have maintained his grip with 18...e4 when 19 f3 exf3 20 ♔c4 ♖e3 21 ♘d2 ♘d5 22 ♗d4 ♘xb6+, while still not fully clear, is better for Black) 14...♘d4+ 15 ♔c3 b6!?

16 ♗e3 (16 cxb6 ♔b7 17 ♗e3 ♖c8+ 18 ♔d3 ♗e7 19 ♗xd4 ♖hd8 20 ♖a2 ♖xd4+ was the main point behind Black's combative 15th; Black's rooks and option to

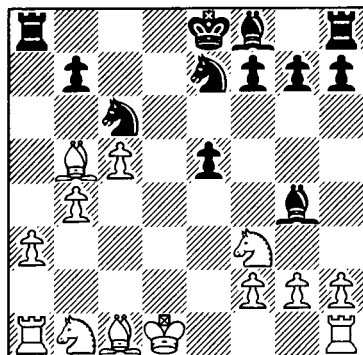
open further lines with ...e4 give him dangerous compensation for the pawns) and now 16...♘xf3 17 cxb6 e4 remained extremely murky in D.Howell-C.Ward, Gausdal 2005. Perhaps Black should have preferred the simpler 16...bxc5!? when the unbalanced ending arising after 17 ♘d2 ♗e7 18 ♘c4 ♘xf3 19 ♗xc5 (or 19 bxc5 e4!) 19...♗xc5 20 bxc5 ♔c7 is about even; it's certainly not that easy for White to defend c5 as 21 ♘d6 ♖b8 22 ♖ab1 ♔c6 demonstrates.

b) 10 ♘bd2 axb4 11 cxb4 ♘d5 (revealing another point behind Black's 9th) 12 ♗b2 ♘dxb4 (12...0-0-0!? also deserves attention) 13 a3 ♘d5 14 ♗xe5 f6 15 ♗xc6+?! (15 ♗d4 was probably a better try, even though c5 will drop off after 15...0-0-0 16 ♗xc6 bxc6 17 ♖e1 ♘c7) 15...bxc6 16 ♗d6 ♗xd6 17 cxd6 ♔d7 18 ♘c4 ♖a4! 19 ♖c1 ♖b8 once again saw Black's activity outweigh White's passed pawns in R.Benninger-G.Legde, Frankfurt 2006.

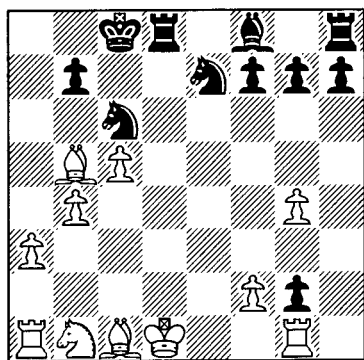
c) 10 ♖e1?! is not the most convincing of moves:

it's more important for White to keep his queenside together than to win e5. Rozentalis and Harley analyse 10...axb4 11 cxb4 0-0-0+ 12 ♗d2 ♘xb4 13 ♖xe5 and now 13...♘ec6 leaves Black with a strong initiative; for example, 14 ♗xc6 ♘xc6 15 ♖e4 f5 16 ♖c4 ♘e5 17 ♖c3 g6 and White's attempts to both defend the c5-pawn and cover the d3-square look set to end in disaster down the long diagonal.

10...axb4

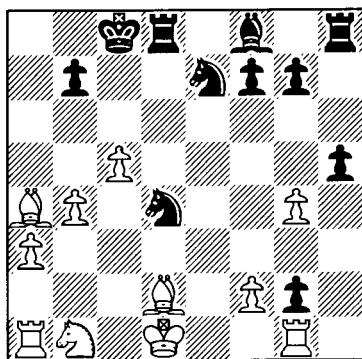
An important exchange to insert. Instead Rozentalis and Harley, as well as Collins, only analyse 10...0-0-0+?! 11 ♘bd2 e4 12 h3 ♗h5 (12...exf3 13 hxg4 fxg2 14 ♖g1 also leaves Black struggling for compensation) 13 g4 ♗xg4 14 hxg4 exf3 15 ♔c2 ♘e5 16 g5 when White was somewhat better in M.Dubois-M.Verot, Val d'Isere 2002.

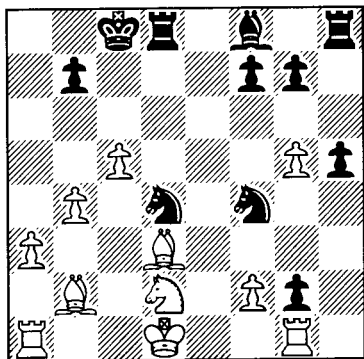
11 cxb4

11...0-0-0+

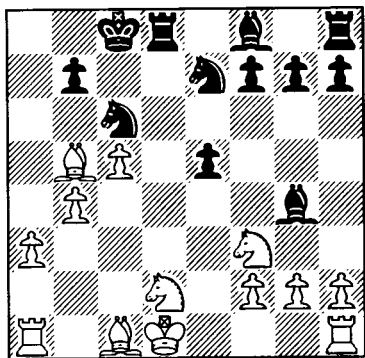
Analysing this position in early 2006 in preparation for playing IM Andrew Ledger, who had just recorded a crushing win on the white side of this variation (albeit only after some insufficiently energetic play by his opponent), my attention was quickly drawn

to the forcing 11...e4!? 12 h3 exf3 13 hxg4 fxg2 14 Rg1 (14 Bxc6+? Nxc6 doesn't help White at all since b4 is en prise and 15 Re1+ Be7 16 Bb2 0-0-0+ very promising for Black) 14...0-0-0+

and I was pleased to later discover that Rogozenko agreed that this was a possible improvement. The resulting positions are fascinating – one can easily get lost in them for many an hour – and could really do with some testing, but I feel this line should be promising for Black. Whether practice will, however, show this particular variation to be more accurate than Black's improvement at move 13 over Ledger-Ward, I'm not entirely sure and so have included some preliminary analysis on both. One thing is guaranteed: the reader will not regret exploring these extremely unbalanced positions.

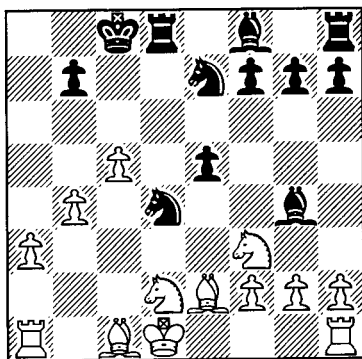
After 14...0-0-0+, 15 Ke1?? is clearly not an option since 15...Nd4 threatens to win material in three different ways. Thus White must block the check:

a) 15 Bd2?! isn't too harmonious and after 15...Nd4 (beginning with 15...h5!? is also very possible) 16 Ba4 (trying to cover b3 like this isn't really necessary, but 16 Be2 h5! 17 gxh5 Nxe2 18 Kxe2 Rxh5 19 Rxg2 Rh1 20 Bc3 Ng6 also leaves Black clearly in the driving seat) 16...h5 (quick counterplay with the h-pawn or down an open h-file is very much the key to this variation)

17 g5 h4 18 Rxg2 h3 19 Rh2 Nf3 20 Rh1 Nf5 White remains both passive and poorly co-ordinated.

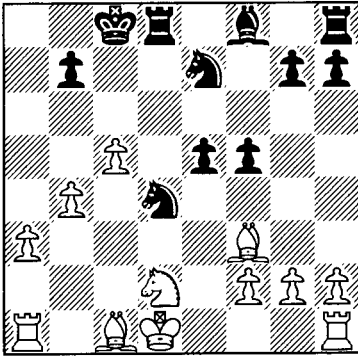
b) 15 Nd2 Nd4 16 Bd3 (trying to plug the d-file; Rogozenko also mentions 16 Be2 Ng6 and 16 Bc4 h5 17 g5 Ng6 18 Rxg2 h4 19 a4 h3 20 Rh2 Ne5 with Black doing quite well in both cases) 16...h5 (this idea again; Rogozenko actually stops here with an assessment of unclear, but already Black has a strong initiative and appears to be doing pretty well) 17 g5 (17 Rxg2 hxg4 18 Rg1 Nec6 19 Re1 Rh3 is very good for Black, but perhaps White might try 17 Bb2!? when 17...hxg4 18 Bxd4 Rxd4 19 Kc2 Rh2 20 Be4 f5 21 Bxg2 Rf4 22 Raf1 Ng6 is one way to keep up the pressure) 17...Nd5 (ensuring that the g-pawn can't be easily rounded up) 18 Bb2 Nf4

19 ♗e4 ♗e7!? (19...♘b3 20 ♗c3 ♘xa1 21 ♗xa1 h4 is also rather good) 20 ♗xd4 ♖xd4 21 ♗xg2 ♜hd8 22 ♖a2 h4 leaves White somewhat worse and very much on the back foot.

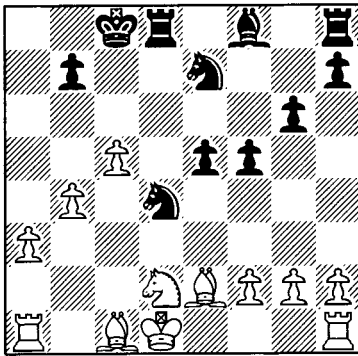
12 ♘bd2

12...♘d4

Black can also transpose to the main line of our last note with 12...e4 13 h3 (13 ♗xc6 ♘xc6 14 h3 ♗e6! 15 ♘g5 ♗d5 – Rowson – followed by advancing the kingside pawn-mass is good for Black) 13...exf3 14 hxg4 fxg2 15 ♖g1 (Rowson also appears to be correct that Black is slightly for preference after 15 ♗xc6!? gxh1♛+ 16 ♗xh1 h5!, correctly fighting for the initiative before White can put his bishops to good use; one possible continuation is 17 g5 ♘f5 18 ♗b2 ♘d4 19 ♖c1 ♗e7 20 f4 f6! 21 gxf6 ♗xf6 and White is struggling) 15...♘d4.

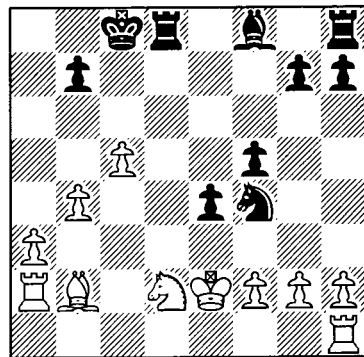
13 ♗e2

We've been following the stem game for 10...axb4, A.Ledger-C.Ward, British League 2005. Ward now rather lost his way and after 13...♘xe2?! 14 ♔xe2 ♘f5 15 ♗b2 I agree with Rogozenko that White was much better. The game continued 15...♘d4+ 16 ♗xd4 exd4 17 ♔d3! ♗f5+ 18 ♘e4 when it was quickly becoming evident that Black was running out of compensation and indeed White went on to record a fine technical win.

Nonetheless, even after 13 ♗e2 I don't feel that White is better. Black should prefer 13...♗xf3 14 ♗xf3 (14 gxf3?! ♘d5 creates some awkward threats) 14...f5! when, as Rowson explains, 'Black's position will certainly be easier to play over the next few moves'.

Indeed I feel that he has good practical chances here. Let's see how play might continue:

a) 15 ♗b2?! ♘b3 16 ♗c3 e4 17 ♗e2 ♘xa1 18 ♗xa1 ♘d5 with ideas of ...♘f4 doesn't seem to give White quite enough for the exchange.

b) 15 ♗h5 g6 16 ♗e2

only helps Black's development; a factor highlighted by the continuation 16...♘d5 17 ♗b2 ♘xe2!? (17...♘f4 looks like a reasonable alternative) 18 ♔xe2 (18 ♗xe5? ♘ec3+ 19 ♔c2 ♖g8 20 ♗xc3 ♘xc3 21 ♔xc3 ♗g7+ wins the exchange) 18...♘f4+. Perhaps, though, this isn't so bad for White after 19 ♔f1!? ♖xd2 20 ♗xe5 ♖xf2+ 21 ♔xf2 ♘d3+ 22 ♔g3 ♘xe5 23 ♖ad1 ♗g7 24 ♖he1 since his queenside majority remains very much a factor in the position, although I'd still be happy with Black here.

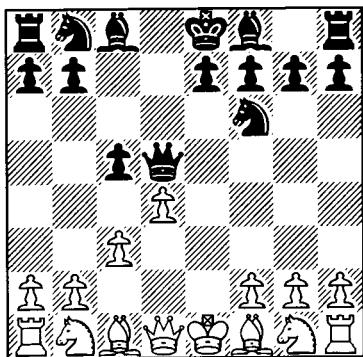
c) 15 ♖b1 brings the rook to a safer square, but gives Black a number of reasonable options, including 15...g6!? and 15...♘g6 (15...e4 is not so good, however, since 16 ♗e2 ♘d5 17 ♗b2 ♘xe2 18 ♔xe2 ♘f4+ 19 ♔d1 ♘xg2 20 ♖g1 ♘f4 21 ♔c2 sees White beginning to take over the initiative; g7 is attacked, while ♘c4 and ♗e5 is an option) 16 ♗b2 ♗e7 when White remains quite cramped and 17 ♗xd4!? ♖xd4 18 ♔c2 ♖hd8 19 ♖hd1 ♘h4 sees Black shortly regain his pawn on g2.

d) 15 ♖a2!? is another attempt to avoid ...♘b3 ideas, but after 15...e4 16 ♗e2 ♘d5 White should avoid the forcing 17 ♗b2?! (the brave 17 ♘b1 is probably critical; Black can't move both knights off the d-file at once and so should probably content himself with retaining his bind after 17...♗e7 and 18...♗f6) 17...♘xe2 18 ♔xe2 ♘f4+

19 ♔d1 ♘xg2 20 ♗xg7? ♗xg7 21 ♖g1 ♖d3 22 ♖xg2 ♗e5 when he is in some trouble down the d-file; note the key tactical point that 23 ♔e2 ♖hd8 24

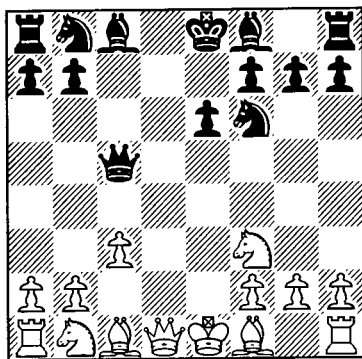
♘c4? f4 rather embarrasses the white king.

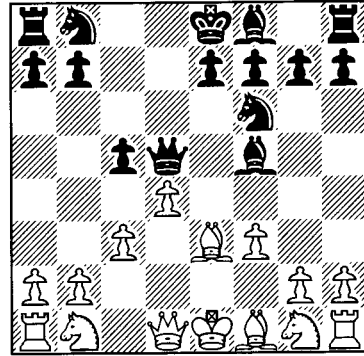
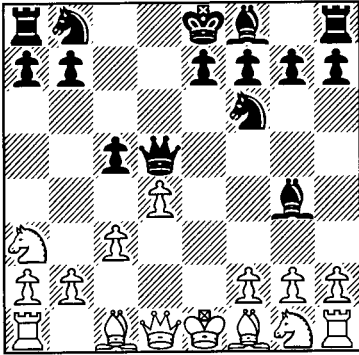
e) 15 ♖e1? is a move which does nothing to alleviate White's problems and 15...e4 16 ♗e2 e3! 17 fxe3 ♘d5 forces White to give up the exchange with 18 ♗b2 (and not, of course, 18 exd4? ♘e3 mate) 18...♘xe3+ 19 ♔c1 ♘xg2 20 ♗xd4 ♘xe1.

Black's improvements over Ledger-Ward on his 11th, 12th and 13th turns suggest that 6 dxc5 is by no means as promising as previous c3 Sicilian sources had hoped. The 10 d5 gambit (Line A12) looks like a more critical try, but overall the recent surge of interest in 5...♗g4 very much deserves to continue.

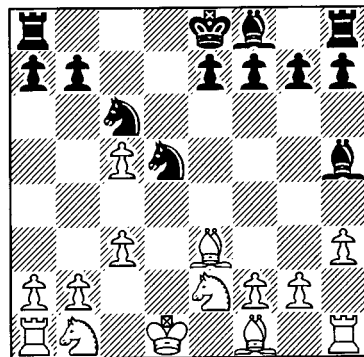
B)
1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 ♕xd5 4 d4 ♘f6

5 ♘f3

As in Line A this is the main move, although White has also tried:

a) 5 dxc5 ♕xc5 (for once I'm not convinced by 5...♕xd1+ 6 ♔xd1 e5 since here 7 b4 ♘c6 8 ♗b5! is a little awkward, but Black can consider 6...♘c6!?; then 7 ♘f3 ♗f5 is an immediate transposition to note 'b' to Black's 5th move below and it's not at all clear that White has a good way to profit from delaying ♘f3 after 7 ♗b5 ♗f5) 6 ♘f3 (White can also delay this, but after the 6 ♗e3 ♕c7 7 ♘a3 ♘c6 8 ♘b5 ♕b8 9 ♘f3 of U.Adianto-J.Lautier, Cap d'Agde 2002, 9...g6, as pointed out by Rogozenko, would have left Black without any real problems; 6 ♘a3 a6! 7 ♘c4 has also been tried when, for example, 7...♘bd7 8 a4 g6 9 ♗e2 ♗g7 10 ♘f3 ♘d5 11 0-0 0-0 12 a5 ♘7f6 was about equal in M.Feygin-J.Rowson, Dutch League 2001) 6...e6 leaves Black very solid and it isn't at all easy for White to force any weaknesses with his policy of piece-play:

7 g3 (or 7 ♗e3 ♕c7 8 ♘a3 ♘c6 9 ♘b5 ♕b8 10 g3 ♗e7 11 ♗g2 0-0 12 0-0, E.Schmittdiel-D.Baramidze, Böblingen 2000, when there is nothing wrong with 12...e5) 7...b6 (wisely preparing to neutralize any pressure down the long diagonal) 8 ♗g2 ♗b7 9 0-0 ♗e7 10 b3 0-0 11 ♕e2 ♖e8 12 c4 ♘bd7 13 ♗b2 ♖ad8 was fairly equal in D.Sermek-M.Prusikin, Steinbrunn 2005.

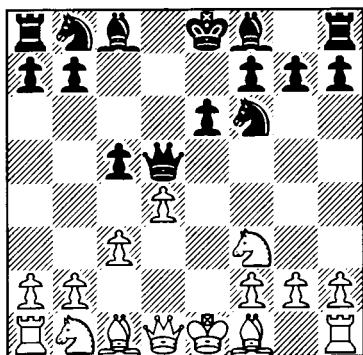
b) 5 ♘a3 remains a move best played only after ...e6. Here 5...♗g4!? is an active and good riposte.

Following 6 f3 (a little ugly, but 6 ♘e2?! ♘c6 7 ♘b5 ♖c8 takes all the sting out of White's queenside foray with some ease) 6...♗d7 7 ♘b5 (White can also decoy the black queen away with 7 ♗c4 ♕h5 and only then go 8 ♘b5, but Black should be OK here after 8...♗xb5 9 ♗xb5+ ♘bd7 10 ♘e2 cxd4 11 ♘xd4 e5!? 12 ♘e2 ♗c5 which remains quite unclear) 7...♘a6 8 ♗e3?! (Rogozenko points out that 8 c4 ♕e6+ 9 ♔f2 is more critical when Black should preface any ideas of ...♕b6 with 9...♖d8) 8...♕e6! 9 ♔f2 ♘d5 10 ♗d2 cxd4 11 ♘xd4?! ♕d6 12 ♗d3 e5 13 ♘b3 ♕b6+ Black's provocative strategy had triumphed in L.Milman-A.Goldin, Connecticut 2003.

c) 5 ♗e3 aims to force Black into an IQP position which is outside our repertoire, but 5...♗g4!? is again a good option; for example, 6 ♘e2?! (6 f3 is probably a better try when an unusual and roughly level IQP position usually arises after 6...cxd4 7 cxd4 ♗d7; I also quite like Spoelman's idea of 6...♗f5!?

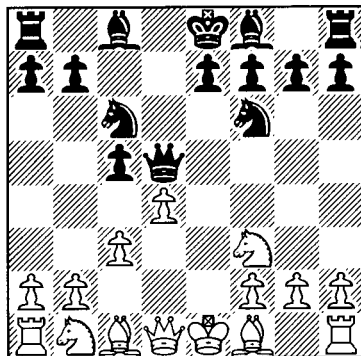
when Black has good piece play and ideas of ...♕e6, with H.Jonkman-W.Spoelman, Wijk aan Zee 2007, continuing 7 ♘a3 ♕e6 8 ♔f2 ♘d5! 9 ♕a4+ ♘c6 10 ♖e1 ♕d7 11 dxc5 ♘xe3 12 ♖xe3 e6 13 b4 ♗e7 14 ♘e2 0-0 with pretty good compensation for the pawn) 6...♘c6 7 dxc5 (the only real way to try and untangle; 7 h3 ♗h5 8 ♖g1?! was horribly artificial in J.Penttinen-M.Rytshagov, Tampere 2000, and 8...e5 9 g4 ♗g6 10 dxc5 ♕xd1+ 11 ♔xd1 0-0-0+ 12 ♔c1 ♘d5 13 b4 ♗e7 14 ♗d2 h5! left Black somewhat better) 7...♕xd1+ 8 ♔xd1 ♘d5 9 h3 ♗h5

10 ♘d2 and now 10...0-0-0 retained

good compensation in V.Potkin-A.Shariyazdanov, Elista 2001, but Black might also have tried for more with Rogozenko's suggestion of 10...e5!? and if 11 g4 ♗g6 12 b4, then 12...♗e7 13 ♗g2 0-0-0 with strong pressure down the d-file.

Returning to 5 ♘f3:

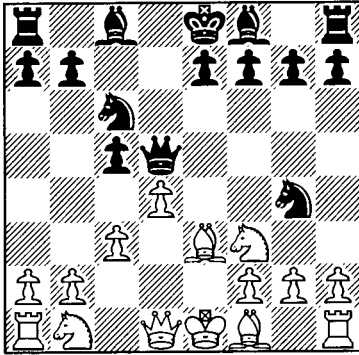
5...e6

Solidly defending c5 and preparing to develop the kingside. Traditionally with this move order Black has acquiesced to an IQP position, but as we will see he can obtain a reasonable game without reaching such a structure. White must now decide what type of IQP set-up, if even one at all, he is after:

B1: 6 ♗d3
B2: 6 ♗e2
B3: 6 ♘a3
B4: 6 ♗e3

Before launching into a thorough discussion of these important variations, we should note that Black can also play to reduce White's options with 5...♘c6!?; a move order which may be especially of interest to those facing 1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 c3.

Black's main point is that his light-squared bishop is not yet blocked in; a factor which becomes particularly important after both 6 ♗d3?! ♗g4 (e.g. 7 ♗e3 cxd4 8 cxd4 ♗xf3 9 gxf3 e6 10 ♘c3 ♕d7 11 a3 ♗e7 with a large positional advantage, T.Dekker-D.Komljenovic, Benidorm 1992) and 6 ♘a3 ♗g4 (e.g. 7 ♗e2 cxd4 8 ♘b5 0-0-0!? 9 ♘bxd4 e5 10 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 with easy development and at least equality after 11 ♕c2 ♗c5 12 0-0 ♖he8 13 ♘g5 ♗xe2 – 13...e4!? is a more ambitious try – 14 ♕xe2 ♖d7 15 ♗e3 h6, P.Haba-V.Stoica, Eforie-Nord 1988).

Thus White often opts for 6 ♗e2 when 6...e6 transposes to the note to Black's 6th in Line B2. Should he not wish to be forced to play an IQP position with his bishop on e2, White must try one of:

a) 6 ♗e3 hopes, like Line B4 below, to reach an IQP position with bishops on d3 and e3. Some black players may be perfectly happy to contest such a

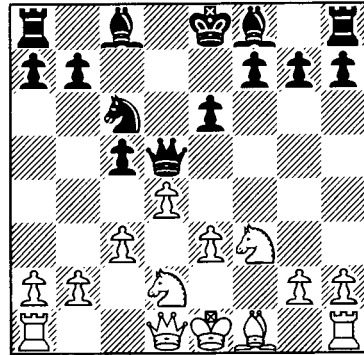
position, but I believe that 6...♘g4!? is a fighting and fully playable alternative, despite being rarely seen these days.

White now has:

a1) 7 c4?! ♕e4! only helps Black: 8 ♘c3 ♘xe3 9 ♘xe4 ♘xd1 10 ♖xd1 cxd4 11 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 12 ♖xd4 e5 13 ♘d6+ ♗xd6 14 ♖xd6 ♗e6 was already slightly better for Black in J.Schlenker-A.Sokolov, Moscow 1990.

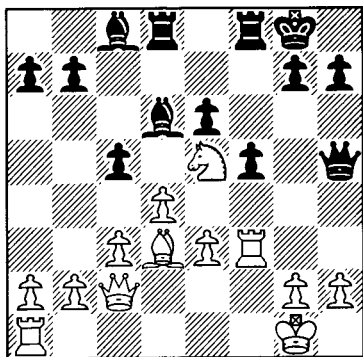
a2) 7 ♗g5?! is a misguided attempt to save the bishop: 7...h6 8 ♗h4 g5 9 ♗g3 f5! 10 h3 f4 saw Black's active approach already give him the advantage in A.Strikovic-N.Nikolic, Yugoslav Championship, Kladovo 1991.;

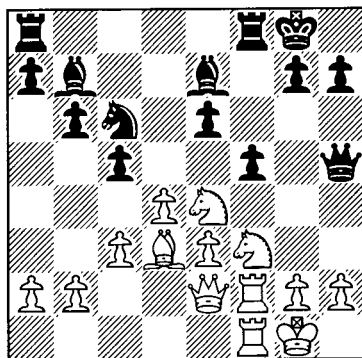
a3) 7 ♘a3 cxd4!? (7...♘xe3 8 fxe3 ♗g4 9 ♗c4 ♗xf3 10 ♗xd5 ♗xd1 11 ♖xd1 cxd4 12 ♘b5 0-0-0 is a solid and fully satisfactory alternative, E.De Kleuver-R.Mantovani, Montecatini Terme 1998) 8 ♘b5 ♕d8 9 cxd4 e5! 10 d5 ♗b4+ 11 ♘c3 was most unlike a typical c3 Sicilian in H.Stevic-D.Pira, Leipzig 2002, and now Rogozenko's suggestion of 11...♗xc3+! 12 bxc3 ♘e7 would have given Black good counterplay, such as with 13 d6 ♘c6 14 ♗g5 ♕b6 15 ♕d2 h6 16 ♗h4 e4.

a4) 7 ♗d3 ♘xe3 8 fxe3 e6 9 0-0 ♗e7 10 ♘bd2 (or 10 ♕c2 ♕h5 11 ♘bd2 0-0) 10...0-0 transposes to the next variation.

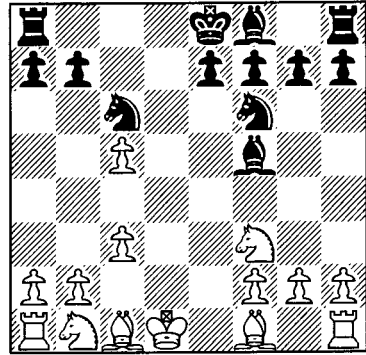
a5) 7 ♘bd2 ♘xe3 8 fxe3 e6 gives White an extra central pawn and some potential pressure down the f-file in return for the two bishops.

After 9 ♗d3 (9 ♗c4 ♕h5 10 0-0 ♗e7 11 ♘e4 0-0 12 ♕e1 b6 was fine for Black in T.Smith-J.Donaldson, Los Angeles 1995, since the black queen always has h6 if needed, but perhaps 11 ♘e5!? is more challenging; S.Brady-C.Braga, Yerevan Olympiad 1996, continued 11...♕xd1 12 ♖axd1 ♘xe5 13 dxe5 ♗d7 14 ♗e2 0-0 15 ♗f3 ♖ab8 16 ♘e4 when Gallagher feels White was a little better, but I'm not convinced since White lacks a pawn break and indeed 16...♖fd8 17 ♘d6 ♗xd6! 18 ♖xd6 – 18 exd6 f6 is also fine for Black who will play to attack d6 with ...♔f7, ...♗c6, an exchange of bishops, ...e5 and ...♔e6 – 18...♗e8 19 ♖fd1 ♖dc8 20 ♔f2 ♔f8 21 ♖1d2 was agreed drawn in the game before Black seized some space with ...c4 and ...♖c5) 9...♗e7 10 0-0 (10 ♕c2

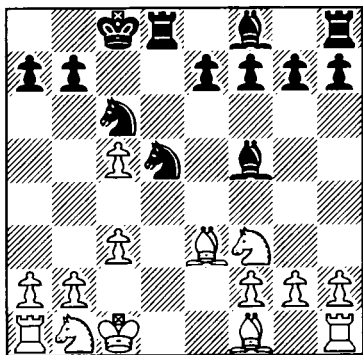
♕h5 is likely to transpose after 11 0-0 0-0, although I suppose an aggressive white player might try 11 0-0-0!? when 11...cxd4 12 exd4 ♗d7 sees Black prepare to either go long or, more ambitiously, counterattack with ...♖b8 and ...b5-b4) 10...0-0 theory has often suggested that White has an edge, but this is by no means so clear to me from examining the limited practical experience. Indeed by unravelling patiently and keeping an eye on the kingside defence, Black may well be fine:

a51) 11 ♕c2 ♕h5! (a key defensive resource) 12 ♗e4 ♗d7 13 ♘c4 ♖ad8 leaves Black very solid and White struggling to make progress. R.Molander-J.Benjamin, Cork 2005, continued 14 ♘fe5?! (14 ♖f2 may improve, but 14...f5 15 ♗d3 ♗c8 16 ♖af1 ♔h8 17 a4 ♖f6 18 ♘fe5 ♘xe5 19 ♘xe5 ♗d6 still didn't give White any advantage in S.Speck-J.Schulz, correspondence 1993) 14...♘xe5 15 ♘xe5 ♗c8! (wisely keeping the bishop-pair and preparing to defend with ...f5) 16 ♖f3 f5 17 ♗d3 ♗d6

18 ♗c4!? (the earlier 18 ♖h3 ♕e8 19 ♘c4 ♗c7 20 a4 would also have turned out well for Black in J.Lautier-G.Serper, Dortmund 1993, had he now taken over the centre with 20...e5 21 dxe5 ♗xe5 22 ♖f1 g6 23 ♘xe5 ♕xe5 – Serper) 18...♕e8 19 a4 (easy to criticize, but finding a good plan here for White is far from easy; hence why the exchange of knights is probably wrong) 19...♔h8 20 ♖af1 ♗xe5 21 dxe5 ♗d7, attacking a4 and also preparing ...♗c6, which left Benjamin, a noted c3 Sicilian expert, with a pleasant advantage.

a52) 11 ♕e2 ♕h5! (once again the queen is well placed here to contain White on the kingside) 12 ♘e4 b6 13 ♖f2 (White later preferred 13 ♘g3 ♕h6 14 ♗e4 ♗b7 15 ♘e5, but this was well neutralized by 15...♘xe5! 16 ♗xb7 ♖ab8 17 ♗e4 ♘d7 18 ♗c2 ♘f6 19 ♖ae1 ♗d6 in S.Vajda-H.Groetz, Austrian League 2006; after 20 e4?! ♗xg3 21 hxg3 cxd4 22 cxd4, Black could have gained a good game with 22...♖bc8 and then, for example, 23 ♖f4 ♕g6 24 ♔h2 ♖fd8 25 ♖d1 ♘h5 26 ♖f3 h6) 13...♗b7 14 ♖af1 was A.Mortazavi-J.Waitzkin, USA 1994, and now, rather than the game's 14...♕h6 15 h4! f5 16 ♘eg5, 14...f5!

would have been fine for Black, especially in the case of 15 ♘g3 ♛g6 16 d5!? (16 ♗a6 ♗xa6 17 ♛xa6 retains the tension and makes good positional sense, but Black should be fine after 17...♗d6) 16...exd5 17 ♘d2 ♛g4!.

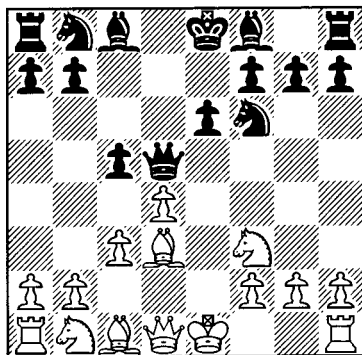
a53) 11 ♗e4!? has only been seen twice, but may well be the most testing continuation. After 11...♛h5 (for once this might not be the best square; 11...♛d6!? 12 ♘c4 ♛c7 was preferred in L.Altounian-J.Donaldson, Los Angeles 1995, and after 13 ♘ce5 ♘xe5 14 ♘xe5 ♗d6 15 ♘f3, had Black avoided the Greek Gift with Gallagher's suggestion of 15...f5 he would have been doing quite well) 12 ♗xc6!? (an idea of Pavasovic's; he actually preferred 12 ♘c4 in D.Pavasovic-I.Farago, Ljubljana 2002, when Black must avoid 12...♗d7? 13 dxc5, but 12...cxd4 13 exd4 ♗d7 improves when both 14 ♛b3 ♖ab8 and 14 ♘ce5 ♘xe5 15 ♘xe5 ♛xd1 16 ♖fxd1 ♗e8! don't seem to give White much, if indeed anything at all) 12...bxc6, 13 ♘e5 is tricky when Pavasovic analyses 13...♛xd1 14 ♖axd1 ♗b7 15 ♘e4 (15 ♘d7 cxd4 should be OK for Black since 16 ♘xf8? runs into the intermezzo 16...dxe3) 15...cxd4 16 cxd4 f6 17 ♘d7 ♖fd8 18 ♘dc5 ♗c8 which he assesses as being slightly better for White, but again it's not that easy to make progress against Black's bishop-pair and solid position.

b) 6 dxc5 is the 'critical test' according to Rozentalis and Harley. Now 6...♛xd1+ 7 ♔xd1 is usually followed up by 7...e5 when play can quickly become quite complex and theoretical. A less common but, I believe, no less dangerous alternative is 7...♗f5!?, intending to castle as quickly as possible:

b1) 8 ♗b5 0-0-0+ 9 ♔e2 e5 (only now that White's king has been unable to escape to the queenside) 10 ♗e3 (or 10 b4 ♘d5 11 ♗xc6 bxc6 12 ♗d2 f6! 13 ♖d1 g5 14 ♘a3 ♗e7 and with ...h5 followed by further kingside expansion on the agenda, Black was doing quite well in G.Gottardi-A.Grahl, correspondence 1989) 10...♘d5 11 ♗xc6 (a necessary exchange; 11 b4? being impossible on account of 11...♗xb1 when c3 hangs) 11...bxc6 12 ♘xe5 ♘xe3 13 fxe3 ♗xc5! 14 ♖f1 (14 ♘xc6 ♗g4+ 15 ♔f2 ♖d6! 16 ♘d4 ♖f6+ followed by 17...♖e8 saw Black regaining one of the two sacrificed pawns while retaining the initiative and at least full compensation for the other in V.Werner-S.Gross, Balatonbereny 1996) 14...♗e6 15 ♘d2 ♖he8 16 ♘ec4 ♗g4+ 17 ♘f3 ♖e4 18 b3 saw Black's active pieces supply good compensation in J.Ramirez Gonzalez-A.Jerez Perez, Spain 1996, although I doubt that he can do any more than regain the pawn on e3 with rough equality.

b2) 8 ♗e3 0-0-0+ 9 ♔c1!? (evacuating the king to the queenside thus has been endorsed by both Collins and by Rozentalis and Harley; instead 9 ♘bd2 e6! 10 ♗b5 ♘d5 11 ♗xc6 bxc6 12 ♘e5 ♘xe3+ 13 fxe3 ♗xc5 once again gave Black promising counterplay down the d-file and with his unopposed bishop-pair in E.Sveshnikov-P.Martynov, Val Maubuee 1990) 9...♘d5

10 b4 (White should probably avoid playing this voluntarily; 10 ♗b5!? looks like an improvement when Black might develop quite slowly with 10...g6!? 11 ♘bd2 ♔c7 12 ♖e1 f6 since the option to exchange on e3 won't run away and keeping the knight on d5 for as long as possible prevents b4; here Black has reasonable compensation, such as with 13 ♗c4 e5 14 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 15 b4 ♗d3 16 ♔b2 g5! or 13 ♘d4 ♘xd4!? 14 cxd4 ♘b4) 10...g6! (exploiting the absence of ...e5) 11 b5?! ♘xe3 12 fxe3 was the original course of D.Bucher-F.Maeser, Swiss League 2006, and now rather than the flashy 12...♘b4!? of the game, I like the simple 12...♘a5! followed by 13...♗h6 when White cannot save the e3-pawn.

B1)

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 ♕xd5 4 d4 ♘f6 5 ♘f3 e6 6 ♗d3

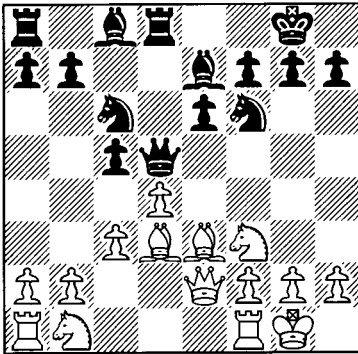
The most natural and active square for the light-squared bishop, but White is going to struggle to develop his queenside so easily.

6...♗e7 7 0-0 0-0

Refusing to exchange on d4 like this is by far the easiest way to equalize. Those who like to play against an IQP should not, however, be put off preferring 7...cxd4 8 cxd4 ♘c6. The white position is then more dangerous than in our main line, but with some care and IQP experience Black should be OK; for example, after 9 ♘c3 ♕d6 10 a3 0-0 11 ♗c2 b6 (11...♖d8!? might well be more accurate) 12 ♕d3 ♗b7 13 ♖e1 there is a nasty threat of d5 which Black can, equally thematically, nip in the bud with 13...g6!.

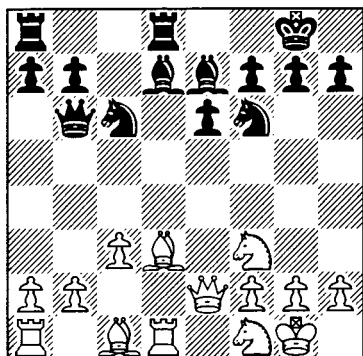
8 c4

The most obvious way to try and take advantage of Black's refusal to create an IQP. As 8 dxc5 ♖d8 is an easy equalizer, White has also tried:

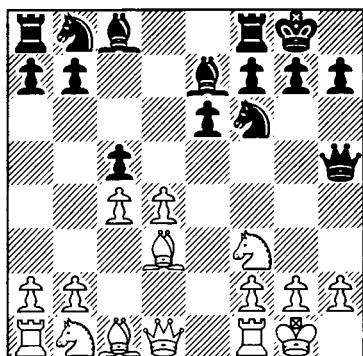
a) 8 ♗e3 ♖d8 (increasing the pres-

sure down the d-file, but 8...♘c6 is a good alternative; after 9 ♕e2 cxd4 10 cxd4 ♘b4! 11 ♘c3 ♕h5 White doesn't want to part with his key light-squared bishop – 12 ♘e5?! ♘xd3 13 ♕xd3 b6 14 ♘e4 ♗b7 15 f3 ♖ad8 16 ♖ad1 ♘xe4! 17 fxe4 f6 18 ♘f3 ♕g6 was excellent for Black in A.Kunte-S.Tiviakov, Ubeda 1999 – but 12 ♗c4 b6 13 a3 ♘bd5 is very comfortable for Black with a knight already on d5 and his queen well placed on h5, J.Speelman-Cu.Hansen, Munich 1992) 9 ♕e2 (instead 9 ♘e5 ♘c6 10 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 merely helps Black free his position through exchanges, and 9 c4 ♕h5 10 ♗e2 ♘g4!? 11 ♗f4 cxd4, while less clear, is also fine for Black; for example, 12 h3 ♘h6! 13 ♗c7 d3 14 ♗xd3 ♖d7 15 ♗f4 ♘c6 16 ♕e2 ♘b4 hunted down the bishop-pair to fully equalize in N.Zinina-I.Novikov, Cattolica 1993) 9...♘c6

10 ♖d1 (10 a3 b6 11 b4?! ♗b7 12 ♘bd2 cxd4 13 cxd4 ♖ac8 was another slightly unconvincing IQP position for White in L.Vajda-Nguyen Anh Dung, Budapest 1999; Black now played powerfully and instructively with 14 ♖fd1 h6 15 h3 ♗d6! 16 ♗c4?! ♕h5 17 ♕f1 ♘e7 18 ♖ac1 ♘f5 to gain the initiative) 10...cxd4 11 cxd4 (11 ♘xd4 e5 12 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 didn't pose any difficulties in S.Janovsky-K.Sakaev, Dortmund 1991) 11...♘b4! is very similar to the note to Black's 8th. Once again Black's firm control of d5 and active queen on h5 give him an easy game; for example, 12 ♘c3 ♕h5 13 ♘e5 (or 13 ♗c4 b6 14 ♘e5 ♕xe2 15 ♗xe2 ♗b7 16 ♖ac1 ♖ac8 and again Black has the better long-term prospects, A.Huber-N.Miezis, Schwaebisch Gmuend 2000) 13...♘xd3 14 ♕xh5?! ♘xh5 15 ♖xd3 ♘f6 16 ♗g5 h6 17 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 18 f4 b6 19 ♘e4 ♗b7 20 ♘xf6+ gxf6 21 ♘g4 f5! 22 ♘e3 ♗e4 and Black went on to grind out a win in T.Mamedjarova-K.Arakhamia Grant, Kusadasi 2006.

b) 8 ♕e2 ♘c6 9 ♖d1 (otherwise 9 ♗e3 transposes to a position considered via 8 ♗e3 ♘c6 9 ♕e2, while 9 dxc5 ♕xc5 also fails to bring White any advantage, such as after the 10 ♗g5 h6 11 ♗h4 ♗d7 12 ♘bd2 ♖ad8 13 ♖ad1 ♖fe8!? 14 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 15 ♘e4 ♕e7 of J.Tompa-Z.Ribli, Hungarian 1975, when 16 ♘d6?! ♘d4! was an important tactical detail) 9...♖d8!? (9...cxd4 10 cxd4 ♘b4 is again a good alternative, although here 11 ♘c3 ♕h5 12 ♗c4 gives White a slightly improved, if still equal, version of the position-type prevalent in variation 'a') 10 dxc5 (or 10 ♘a3 ♕h5 11 ♘c2 cxd4 and now with his queen's knight on c2, 12 cxd4 ♗d7 13 ♗f4 ♗e8 14 ♖ac1 ♘d5 didn't see White getting anywhere in E.Sevillano-I.Novikov, Portsmouth 2000) 10...♕xc5

11 ♘bd2 ♗d7! (simpler than 11...e5 12 h3! ♗e6 13 ♘g5) 12 ♘f1!? ♕b6

13 ♘g3 ♗e8 14 ♗g5 ♕c7 left Black very solid and the position pretty level in N.Short-U.Andersson, London 1980.

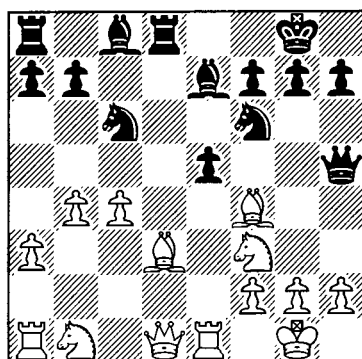
c) 8 ♘a3 ♘c6 9 ♕e2 (9 ♘b5? is rebuffed by 9...c4 10 ♘c7 ♕d8 when the knight will not be able to escape the corner) 9...b6 10 ♗f4 ♗b7 sees Black developing comfortably, R.Smith-I.Rogers, Auckland 1997.

8...♕h5

9 dxc5

Alternatively, 9 ♗e2 ♖d8 can easily lead to an early draw after 10 ♘g5 (or 10 ♗e3 when 10...cxd4 11 ♘xd4 ♕e5 is fine for Black and he also has Novikov's more ambitious 10...♘g4!?, which we considered, above, in note 'a' to White's 8th move) 10...♕h4 11 ♘f3 ♕h5.

White has also failed to gain any advantage with 9 ♘c3 ♘c6 (9...♖d8 is a good alternative) 10 dxc5 ♗xc5; for example, 11 ♗f4 (11 ♗g5?! ♘d4! is a tactical idea worth remembering) 11...♖d8 12 ♕e2 ♘d4!? 13 ♘xd4 ♗xd4 14 ♘b5 e5 saw Black already pursuing the initiative in R.Bozzo-C.Balogh, online blitz 2004.

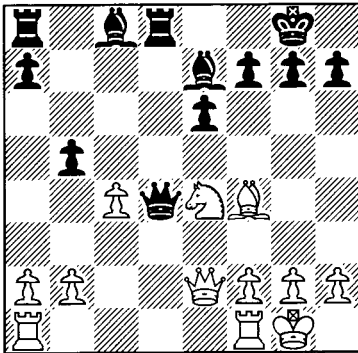
9...♖d8 10 ♗f4 ♕xc5 11 ♕e2

Prudent. White preferred the more ambitious 11 a3!? ♘c6 12 b4 in G.Lee-S.Kudrin, Manchester 1982, but after 12...♕h5 13 ♖e1 (13 ♕e2? e5! is also rather powerful since 14 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 15 ♗xe5 ♖xd3 wins material and 14 ♗xe5 ♗g4 leaves White badly pinned) 13...e5! Black had the initiative.

Kudrin continued aggressively with 14 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 15 ♗xe5 ♘g4!? (very ambitious; 15...♕xd1 16 ♖xd1 ♗f5 17 ♗e2 ♖xd1+ 18 ♗xd1 a5 was a quieter option, retaining compensation for the

pawn) 16 ♗c7?! (16 ♗g3! would have been more critical, intending 16...♗f6 17 ♖a2, while 16...♗f5 17 ♖xe7 ♖xd3 18 ♕e2 ♘f6 19 ♘d2 ♕xe2 20 ♖xe2 ♖ad8 21 ♘f1 appears to leave Black with insufficient compensation) 16...♗h4 and now Lee rather collapsed after 17 ♖a2? ♗f5, but even 17 ♗xd8 ♗xf2+ 18 ♔f1 ♗e6 19 ♗c7 ♖c8! 20 ♗f4 g5 would have left Black with a very strong initiative.

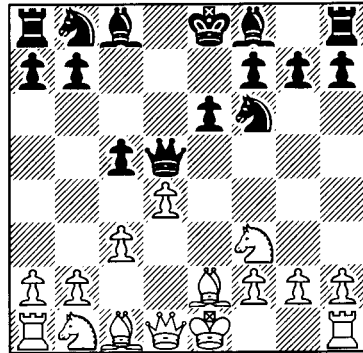
11...♘c6

Threatening 12...♘b4 and the ability to exchange a pair of minor pieces enables Black to fully equalize.

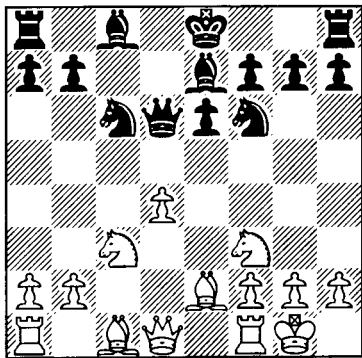
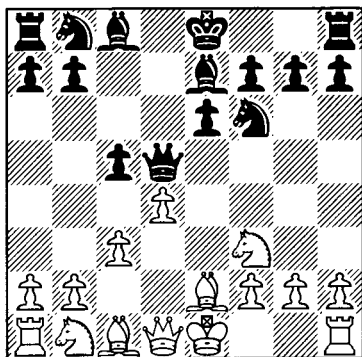
12 ♘c3 ♘d4 13 ♘xd4 ♕xd4 14 ♗e4 ♘xe4 15 ♘xe4 b5!

A key tactical point and one well worth remembering. Now 16 cxb5? ♗b7 17 ♖fe1 ♗b4 takes advantage of the pin along the fourth, and even 18 ♖ec1! doesn't fully save White after 18...♖ac8!. White should thus prefer 16 c5 ♗b7 17 ♗d6, as occurred in two games between Rozentalis and Novikov in the mid-eighties. In the first Black tried the ambitious 17...♖d7!? and in the second he played it safe with 17...♕xe4 18 ♕xe4 ♗xe4 19 ♗xe7 ♖d2 when a draw was unsurprisingly shortly agreed.

That seems as good a moment as any to conclude our coverage of 6 ♗d3. This has not been one of the more exciting sections of this book, but Black is able to equalize without too much trouble by delaying the exchange on d4.

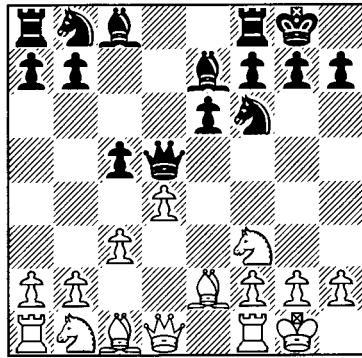
B2)

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 ♕xd5 4 d4 ♘f6 5 ♘f3 e6 6 ♗e2

6...♗e7

Preparing to develop solidly as in Line B1. A popular alternative is 6...♘c6 (those who prefer a 5...♘c6 move order should be aware that they will transpose to this and must be happy to play the resulting IQP position) 7 0-0 cxd4 8 cxd4 (it should be noted too that White can also try and kill the game off with 8 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 9 cxd4 ♗e7 10 ♘c3 ♕d6 11 ♗f3 when an exchanging d5-advance may well follow) 8...♗e7 9 ♘c3 ♕d6, reaching a typically unbalanced IQP position. This may be more to the taste of some read-

ers, although I know others who would prefer to run a mile than play against an IQP (such structures can be very divisive indeed).

Play usually continues 10 ♘b5 ♛d8 11 ♗f4 ♘d5 12 ♗g3 a6 (Black should also consider the less common, but by no means bad 12...0-0 13 ♗c4 a6!? 14 ♗xd5 axb5) 13 ♘c3 0-0 14 ♖c1 ♘f6 and a fair amount of praxis has revealed that this position is finely balanced, although those who like to play against an IQP should find this a reasonable version (White is not yet terribly active).

7 0-0

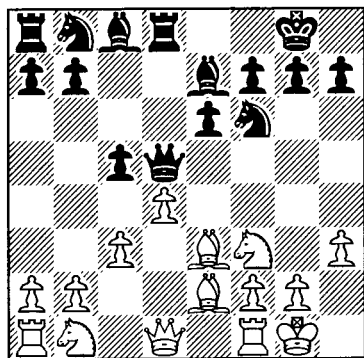
White can also begin with 7 c4 when play usually transposes to our main line with 7...♛d8 8 0-0 0-0.

7...0-0

8 c4

Just as with his bishop on d3, seizing some space and preparing to develop the queen's knight to c3 is White's main continuation. He does have alternatives too, of which 'd' is probably the most critical:

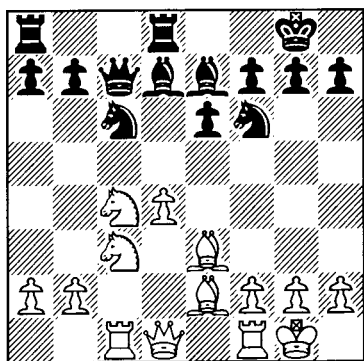
a) 8 dxc5 is best summed up by the fact that this position was agreed drawn in Y.Balashov-A.Kharlov, Russian Championship, Krasnodar 2002. Black has no problems at all to solve here with one good continuation being 8...♛xc5 9 ♗e3 ♛c7 10 ♘bd2 ♘bd7 11 ♛c2 b6 and the position remained rather balanced in A.Panchenko-M.Nepomnishay, Podolsk 1990.

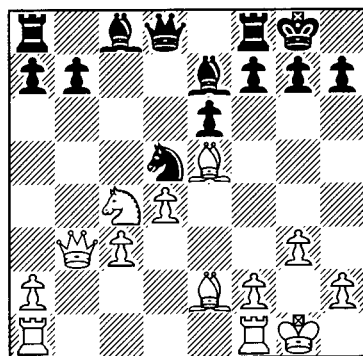
b) 8 ♗e3 ♘g4! is a concept pioneered by Sax and Adorjan to take advantage of White's slightly passive light-squared bishop development. Following 9 ♗f4 ♖d8 10 h3 (or 10 ♛c2 ♘c6 11 ♖d1 cxd4 12 cxd4?! and now the instructive 12...♘b4 13 ♛d2 ♛f5! 14

♘c3 ♗d7 15 a3 ♘d5 16 ♗g3 ♘xc3! 17 bxc3 ♗a4 18 ♖db1 ♗c6 gave Black the more comfortable position in K.Hulak-A.Adorjan, Banja Luka 1983) 10...♘f6 11 ♗e3 both sides have lost some time, but Black's ...♖d8 is probably a more useful gain than White's h3.

This variation in general is often considered a little dull, but Black should not lose hope against a weaker opponent. One model example of how to unbalance the position was seen in R.Gouma-G.Sax, Haarlem 1993: 11...♘bd7!? (the more natural 11...♘c6 is a good alternative, as Sax had previously employed; Black should then meet 12 dxc5 with 12...♕f5! 13 ♘d4 ♛xc5) 12 c4 ♕c6 13 ♕c2 (13 ♘c3 might be more critical, but after 13...a6!? there's no need for Black to fear 14 d5 since 14...exd5 15 cxd5 ♕c7 threatens to round up d5 with 16...♘b6, as well as to expand with ...b5) 13...a6 14 a4?! ♛c7! (a safer square for the queen and a move which, unlike 14...b6, prevents 15 ♘e5) 15 ♘bd2 cxd4 16 ♗xd4 b6 17 ♖ac1 ♗b7 18 ♖fd1 ♗d6 19 ♗e3 ♖ac8 when the black position, due partly to the hole on b4, was both the easier to handle and to improve.

c) 8 h3 rules out ...♘g4 and after 8...♖d8 (once White has lost time on h3, Black may also wish to consider playing for an IQP position with 8...♘c6 9 ♗e3 cxd4) 9 ♗e3 play has transposed to variation 'b', albeit with both sides having saved a couple of moves.

d) 8 ♘e5!? is White's most active approach, but after 8...cxd4 9 cxd4 Black has a reasonable choice:

d1) 9...♖d8 10 ♗e3 (10 ♘c3?! has been tried by no less a c3 authority than Sveshnikov, but some *Informant* notes of his reveal the antidote: 10...♕xd4! 11 ♕xd4 ♖xd4 12 ♘b5 ♖e4 13 ♗f3 ♖xe5 14 ♘c7 ♘c6 15 ♘xa8 ♘d4 with excellent play for the exchange since White's cornered knight is in some trouble, while ...♘xf3+ followed by ...♗d7-c6 is another idea; Rogozenko continues with 16 ♗d1? ♘d5 17 ♗d2 b6 18 ♖c1 ♗a6! when White must lose back the exchange, either immediately or after 19 ♖e1?! ♖xe1+ 20 ♗xe1 ♗g5 when the rook can't remain on the c-file) 10...♘c6 11 ♘c3 (or 11 ♗f3 ♕b5!? 12 ♘xc6 bxc6 13 ♘c3 ♕xb2! 14 ♗xc6 ♕xc3 15 ♗xa8 ♗a6 16 ♗f3 ♗xf1 17 ♕xf1 ♘d5 and the simplification only helped Black in M.Glueck-I.Horvath, Zalakaros 1994) 11...♕a5 12 ♘c4 (White can also play to occupy c5 with 12 ♘xc6 bxc6 13 ♕a4, but after 13...♕xa4 14 ♘xa4 ♘d5 15 ♖ac1 a5! and 16...♗a6, Black's control of d5 fully offset his weaknesses down the c-file in U.Nyberg-M.Sjoberg, Swedish League 1993) 12...♕c7 13 ♖c1 ♗d7

14 ♕b3 was D.Barlov-G.Tringov, Vrnjacka Banja 1982, when the cleanest equalizer would have been 14...♘a5 15 ♘xa5 ♕xa5 16 ♗f3 (16 ♕xb7?! ♖ab8 17 ♕f3 ♖xb2 is good for Black since d5 isn't yet a threat) 16...♗c6 17 ♗xc6 bxc6 followed by ...♖ab8 and/or ...♘d5.

d2) 9...♘bd7 is a more solid option, after which 10 ♘c3 (10 ♗f3 ♕a5 11 ♘xd7 ♗xd7!? 12 ♗xb7 ♖ab8 13 ♗f3 ♗a4 14 ♕e1 ♗b4 gave Black good play for his pawn in J.Blauert-T.Horvath, Davos 2004) 10...♕a5 11 ♘c4 ♕c7 12 g3 (this has been endorsed by Sveshnikov, whereas 12 ♕b3 b6! 13 ♗f3 ♗b7 14 ♘b5 ♕b8 15 ♗xb7 ♕xb7 16 ♗f4 a6 17 ♘c3 ♖fc8 was fine for Black in J.Hjartarson-M.Petursson, Tilburg 1992; note that Black's play is underpinned by the point that 15 ♗f4? ♕xf4 16 ♗xb7 a6! 17 ♘c3 ♘g4 18 g3 ♕h6 19 h4 ♗xh4! – Petursson – gives Black a very strong attack) 12...♘b6! (12...♘d5 13 ♘xd5 exd5 14 ♗f4 ♕d8 gives White an edge after 15 ♘d6 ♘f6 16 ♘xc8 ♖xc8 17 ♕b3 ♗d6 18 ♗g5) 13 ♗f4 ♕d8 is very solid for Black. He is still to develop his light-squared bishop, but I'm not too sure what White is doing with his knight on c4 and the necessary inclusion of g3 is not especially helpful for him. The only practical example so far continued 14 ♕b3 (14 ♘e3 ♗d7 15 ♗f3 ♗c6! 16 ♗xc6 bxc6 is fine for Black; c6 is rarely weaker than b2 and d4 in this structure) 14...♘bd5 15 ♗e5?! ♘xc3 16 bxc3 ♘d5 and with 17...f6 threatened, White was beginning to regret playing g3.

F.Retter-M.Traeger, correspondence 1993, continued 17 g4 b6 18 ♖fe1 ♗a6 19 ♗g3 ♖c8 20 ♖ac1 ♗g5 21 ♖c2 ♘f4 and Black was better.

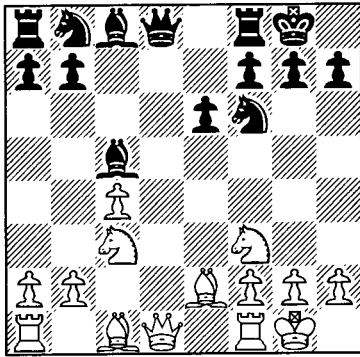
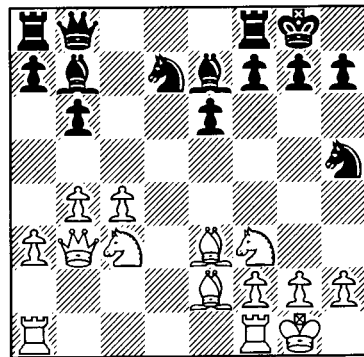
Returning to 8 c4:

8...♕d8

With the bishop on e2, 8...♕h5 is no longer a good idea, but Black doesn't have to play the solid text. Instead 8...♕f5!? is a rare idea which has scored fairly well so far: 9 ♘c3 cxd4 (but not 9...♖d8?? 10 ♘h4 and Black had to resign in G.Lane-J.Flesch, London 1983) 10 ♘xd4 ♕e5 11 ♘f3 (11 ♗e3 ♘c6 12 ♘xc6!? bxc6 13 ♕c2 might be a better try for a tiny edge) 11...♕f5 and now White was happy to repeat with 12

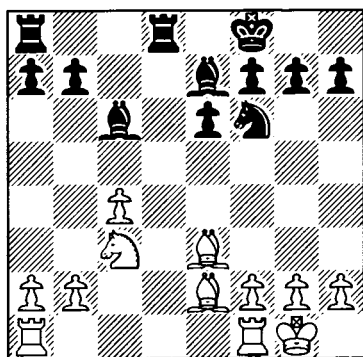
♘d4 ♕e5 13 ♘f3 in M.Hermann-N.Gaprindashvili, Berlin 1988, and Black is also fine after 12 ♗d3 ♕h5 13 ♗e3 ♘c6 14 ♕e2 ♖d8 followed by ...e5 or ...♘g4.

9 ♘c3

Rogozenko believes that 9 dxc5!? ♗xc5 10 ♘c3 is a better try for the advantage. He may well be correct, although Black should be OK here so long as he unravels slowly and patiently.

The best policy to develop the queen's knight to d7, not c6 where it acts as a target for White's queenside pawns, and to fianchetto: 10...♘bd7 (Black can also begin with 10...b6 when White doesn't have to push his queenside pawns, but 11 ♕c2 ♗b7 12 ♗g5 ♘bd7 13 ♖ad1 ♕c7 14 ♗h4 h6 15 a3 ♖fe8! 16 b4 ♗f8 17 ♘b5 ♕c6 18 ♘bd4 ♕c8 failed to bring him any advantage in S.Vysochin-E.Najer, Cappelle la Grande 2004; note here that having fully mobilized Black is ready to consider the pawn breaks ...a5 and ...e5) 11 a3 b6 12 b4 ♗e7 13 ♗f4 (Skripchenko had earlier preferred 13 ♗e3 when 13...♗b7 14 h3 ♕c7 15 ♘b5 ♕b8 16 ♕b3 was the course of A.Skripchenko-E.Bacrot, French Championship, Val d'Isere 2002; as well as Bacrot's 16...e5, Black should also consider both 16...♘e4 and Rogozenko's 16...♘e5!?, logically playing for exchanges to ease Black's slight cramp) 13...♗b7 14 ♕b3 ♘h5! (it's useful to kick the bishop away so that Black can control some dark squares with ...♕b8) 15 ♗e3 ♕b8

16 ♘d4 (or 16 ♖fd1 ♖d8 17 ♘d4 ♘f4 18 ♗f1 ♘f6 19 ♘de2 and now in A.Cherniaev-T.Horvath, Davos 2004, Black could have equalized and begun counterplay with 19...♘xe2+ 20 ♗xe2 ♕e5, followed by ...♘e4 or even ...h5 and ...♘g4) 16...♘f4 17 ♗f3 ♗xf3 18 ♘xf3 ♘e5 19 ♘xe5?! (now White gets into trouble, but even 19 ♘d4 ♘g4 would have seen Black gaining plenty of counterplay with his active knights) 19...♕xe5 20 ♖fe1 ♗f6 was a model handling of the black position from one of the all-time greats in A.Skripchenko-A.Karpov, Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2006. White was now forced into an unfavourable exchange on f4 and was sure

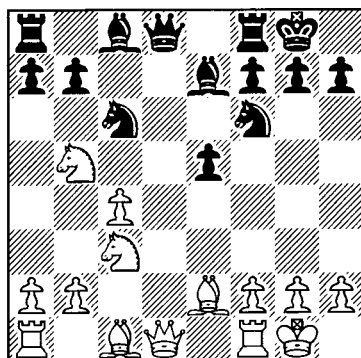
enough then ground down.

9...cxd4 10 ♘xd4

Anand preferred 10 ♕xd4 in V.Anand-V.Ivanchuk, Shenyang 2000, but he didn't gain any advantage after 10...♗d7! (preparing a further exchange of minor pieces to free Black's position; 10...♘c6 11 ♕xd8 ♖xd8 12 ♗f4 gives White more hope of gaining a small edge) 11 ♘e5 ♘c6 12 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 13 ♕xd8 ♖fxd8 14 ♗e3 ♔f8

15 ♖fd1 when Ivanchuk's 15...♖dc8 was by no means the only option: both 15...e5 and 15...♘e4!? 16 ♘b5 ♗c5 also being fine for Black.

10...e5!?

The most active, but the solid 10...♗d7 is a good alternative; for example, 11 ♗f3 (or 11 ♗f4 ♘c6 12 ♗f3 ♖c8 13 ♘db5!? e5 14 ♗e3, as in S.Brynell-A.Wojtkiewicz, Stockholm 1991, and now the simplest course is probably 14...♗e6!, meeting 15 ♘d5 with 15...e4 and 15 c5 with 15...♗c4, followed by ...e4 or ...♘d4) 11...♕c8 12 ♕e2 ♘c6 13 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 14 b3 ♖d8 and Black had fully equalized in M.Bjelajac-A.Adorjan, Vrsac 1983.

11 ♘db5 ♘c6

12 ♗e3

White has also tried:

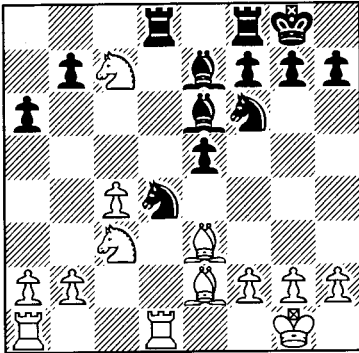
a) 12 ♘d5!? heads straight for the slight weakness when I believe that Black should immediately focus on the key d4- and d5-squares with the untried 12...♗e6!? (12...a6 13 ♘bc7 ♖b8 14 ♗e3 was a little better for White in S.Mariotti-B.Soos, Rome 1982), after which 13 ♘xe7+ (giving up d5, but 13 ♘bc7 ♘xd5 14 ♘xd5 ♘d4 is fine for Black, as is 13 ♘dc7 a6 14 ♘xe6 fxe6 15 ♘c3 ♕c7, followed again by establishing the knight on d4) 13...♕xe7 14 ♕d6 ♕xd6 15 ♘xd6 ♘d4 16 ♗d3 ♘d7! sees the strong d4-knight offset White's bishop-pair.

b) 12 ♗g5 ♗e6 13 ♕xd8 ♖axd8 14 ♘c7 was seen in M.Krishmaru-B.Shkliar, Ilyichevsk 2006, when 14...♗f5 followed by ...♘d4 would have maintained rough equality.

c) 12 ♕xd8 ♗xd8!? 13 ♘d6 ♘d4 14 ♗d1 ♗e6 saw Black making good use of the d4- and e6-squares to gain counterplay in H.Robitsch-B.Gruzmann, Naumburg 2002.

12...♗e6

Covering d5. In J.Polgar-J.Lautier, Monaco (rapid) 1995, Black preferred the provocative 12...♗f5!? when 13 ♘d5 ♘xd5 14 cxd5 ♘b4 15 d6 ♗f6 had certainly unbalanced the position, although now 16 ♖ac1 probably favours White, since it's not that easy for Black to implement ...♘c6-d4 followed by rounding up d6, whereas Polgar's 16 ♘c7 ♖c8 17 ♗xa7 was much less convincing after 17...♘c2 18 ♖c1 ♗g5.

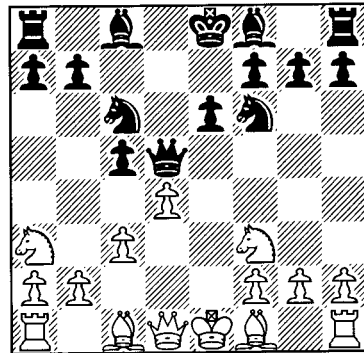
13 ♕xd8 ♖axd8 14 ♖fd1 a6 15 ♘c7 ♘d4

We've been following R.Morrison-I.Findlay, Ottawa 1984, in which quite a typical situation for 10...e5 had arisen: White hasn't been able to do much with his control of d5 and by invading d4 Black has gained some counterplay. After the game's 16 ♘xe6, I quite like 16...fxe6!?, doubling Black's pawns, but keeping White out of d5. White does have the bishop-pair, but the strong d4-knight keeps everything together for Black. One plan is to double on the d-file, ...♗b4 is another, and 17 a3 ♘c2 18 ♖xd8 ♗xd8 19 ♖c1 ♘xe3 20 fxe3 ♗b6, which remains roughly even, illustrates Black's other possibility.

6 ♗e2 ♗e7 7 0-0 0-0 is another rather solid line for Black, but don't forget that he can, depending on taste, prefer to play against an IQP should he so wish.

B3)

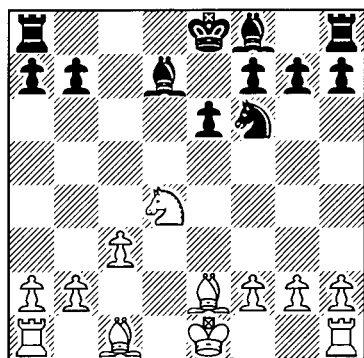
1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 ♕xd5 4 d4 ♘f6 5 ♘f3 e6 6 ♘a3

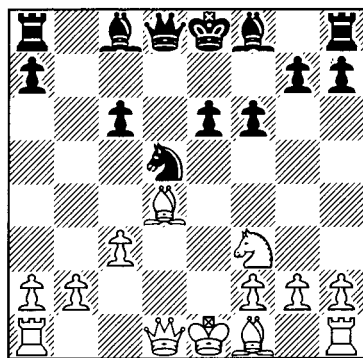
If White wishes to avoid playing with an IQP, not that we intend to inflict one, the text is his only real choice. Notably it's the invariable choice of leading c3 protagonist, Sergei Tiviakov, against 5...e6 which is, incidentally, his own preference when faced himself with 2 c3.

6...♘c6

More common is 6...♕d8, but the text has the support of a number of theoreticians, including Krasenkow, Sutovsky and Andrei Sokolov, and I don't believe that Black has much to fear in the resulting queenless middlegame.

7 ♘b5

Logical, but sometimes White prefers to delay this for a move:

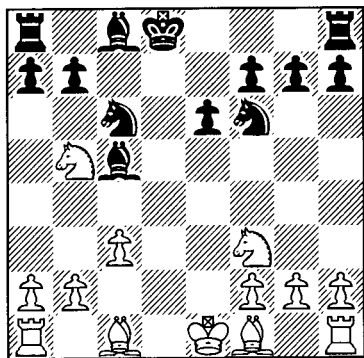
a) 7 ♗e2 cxd4 8 ♘b5 ♕d8 9 ♘bxd4 (or 9 0-0 ♗c5!? 10 ♘bxd4 ♘xd4 11 ♘xd4 0-0 12 ♘b3 ♗d6 13 ♗g5 ♕c7! and Black had a comfortable 4...♕xd5 French Tarrasch-type position in D.Pavasovic-K.Landa, Trieste 2005) 9...♘xd4 10 ♕xd4 (White hopes to use his three versus two queenside majority in an endgame; instead 10 ♘xd4 should probably not be met by 10...e5 since 11 ♗b5+ ♗d7 12 ♕e2 is dangerous, but the safer 10...♗c5 11 ♗e3 ♗b6, intending ...0-0 and ...e5 or ...♘d5, equalized pretty easily in E.Prie-O.Touzane, Auxerre 1996) 10...♕xd4 11 ♘xd4 ♗d7

12 0-0 ♗c5 (as Black would like to keep his king quite close to the centre, 12...0-0-0!? also deserves consideration) 13 ♘b3 ♗b6 14 ♗f3 0-0-0! is fine for Black whose extra central pawn and more-centralized king balance White's queenside majority. B.Macieja-P.Varga, Budapest 1996, continued 15 a4 a6 16 ♗g5 h6 17 ♗h4 ♔b8 18 ♖fd1 ♗c8, logically preparing to further free Black's position through exchanges.

b) 7 ♗e3 is probably a more critical alternative having been used by Tiviakov: 7...cxd4 8 ♘b5 ♕d8 9 ♘bxd4 ♘d5 10 ♘xc6 (freeing the d4-square for the attacked bishop; instead 10 ♗g5 ♕b6 is fine for Black who now developed comfortably with 11 ♕b3 ♗c5 12 ♕xb6 ♗xb6 13 ♖d1 h6 14 ♗c1 ♘xd4 15 ♘xd4 ♗d7 16 ♗c4 ♗a4! in J.Degraeve-A.Sokolov, French Championship, Aix les Bains 2003) 10...bxc6 11 ♗d4 (White really needs to keep this bishop; the later 11 ♕a4 ♘xe3 12 fxe3 ♕b6 13 ♗e2 ♗c5 14 ♘e5 0-0 failed to especially impress in A.Burtasova-E.Ovod, Dresden 2007, although White might have now saved her b-pawn with 15 ♘c4) 11...f6!

12 ♗c4 (12 ♗d3!? might look more dangerous, but after 12...e5 13 ♘xe5 fxe5 14 ♕h5+ ♔d7 15 ♗xe5 ♗d6 White's temporary initiative is worth no more than a draw: 16 ♕g4+ ♔e8 17 ♗g6+! ♔e7! [17...hxg6? is rather too risky in view of 18 ♕xg6+ ♔e7 19 ♕xg7+! ♔e6 20 ♕g6+ ♔e7 21 ♗xd6+ with some advantage – Rogozenko] 18 ♕g5+ ♔d7 19 ♗f5+ ♔e8 20 ♗g6+ ♔d7 and it's perpetual; the only real alterna-

tive here is 17 ♕xg7, but after 17...♗xe5 18 ♕xe5+ ♕e7 Black's extra knight should be of much more short-term use than White's three extra pawns) 12...c5!? (preparing ...e5 with Rogozenko's 12...♗e7 is also quite playable, but the immediate 12...e5 was rather dangerous for Black after 13 ♗xe5! fxe5 14 ♘xe5 in S.Tiviakov-J.Smeets, Dutch Championship, Leeuwarden 2005) 13 ♗b5+ ♗d7 (keeping it simple; I also wonder about 13...♔f7!? 14 ♗e3 ♖b8 15 c4 ♕c7! for Black) 14 ♗xd7+ ♕xd7 15 ♗e3 ♘xe3 16 fxe3 ♕xd1+ 17 ♔xd1 ♔d7 is fine for Black and 18 ♔c2 ♔c6 19 ♖ad1 ♗e7 20 ♖d2 ♖ad8 21 ♖e2 h5! led to nothing more than an unbalanced but fairly level ending in S.Tiviakov-L.Ftacnik, Amsterdam 2006.

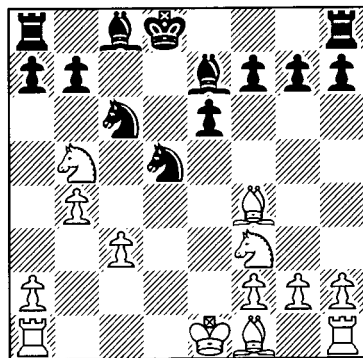
7...♕d8 8 dxc5

Only by preventing Black from castling can White hope to prove any advantage.

8...♗xc5 9 ♕xd8+ ♔xd8

10 ♗f4

White's most popular continuation, but he can also consider:

a) 10 ♗g5 ♔e7 11 ♖d1 a6 forces White backwards since the knight would only get trapped on c7, and after 12 ♘bd4 ♘xd4 13 ♘xd4 ♖d8 14 ♗e2 ♗xd4 (Veingold's 14...h6!? 15 ♗e3 ♗a7 is a reasonable alternative) 15 cxd4 ♗d7 16 ♗f3! ♗c6! 17 ♗xc6 bxc6 18 ♔e2 ♖d5 19 ♗xf6+ ♔xf6 20 ♖c1 ♖xd4 21 ♖xc6 ♖ad8 22 ♖c2 White was able to maintain the balance in M.Sindjic-D.Barlov, Caorle 1982.

b) 10 b4!? is the most dynamic choice, but 10...♗e7 (Krasenkow has preferred the sharper 10...♗b6!?, but after the 11 ♘d6 ♔e7 12 ♘c4 ♘e4 13 ♘xb6 axb6 of V.Nevednichy-M.Krasenkow, Warsaw 2005, Rowson's 14 b5! ♘a5 15 ♗a3+ would have been a little better for White) 11 ♗f4 (or 11 ♗g5 h6 – 11...♘e4 12 ♗xe7+ ♔xe7 13 ♗d3 ♘f6 is a solid alternative – 12 0-0-0+ ♗d7 13 ♗xf6 and now in S.Milton-V.Krasnov, St Petersburg 1999, Black should have let the knight do its worst, which frankly doesn't look like very much at all, with 13...♗xf6! 14 ♘d6 ♔e7) 11...♘d5 (improving the knight with tempo is a key resource for Black, both here and in our main line)

12 ♗g3 (this entails a pawn sacrifice, but 12 ♖d1?! ♗d7 13 ♘e5 ♘xe5 14 ♗xe5 f6 15 ♗d4 a6 16 ♘a3 a5 drove White back in disarray in G.Franchini-K.Landa, Reggio Emilia 2005) 12...a6 13 ♘d6 ♗xd6 14 ♗xd6 ♘xc3 doesn't seem to give White enough for his pawn; L.Gusev-I.Lutsko, Novaya Ladoga 2002, continued 15 ♘e5 (or 15 ♘g5 ♔e8 16 ♗d3 f6 17 ♘e4 ♘d5 and again White is hampered by a powerful knight on d5) 15...♘xe5 16 ♗xe5 ♘d5 17 ♗xg7 ♖g8 18 ♗e5 ♘xb4 19 ♖b1 ♘d5 and Black remained slightly for choice.

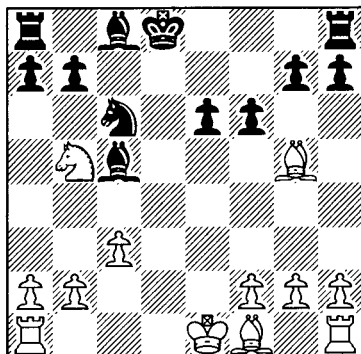
10...♘e4!

Not just striving for immediate counterplay, but also usefully covering the d6-square.

11 ♘g5

Forcing the exchange of the powerful black knight. White has also failed to gain any advantage with 11 ♖d1+ ♗d7 (a solid and good alternative is 11...♔e7 12 ♘bd4 ♘xd4 13 ♘xd4 ♖d8 14 ♗d3 ♘f6 as employed by Degraeve, Nevednichy and Yudasin) 12 ♗e3 ♗xe3 13 fxe3 a6 14 ♘bd4 (the only real try; 14 ♘d6 ♘xd6 15 ♖xd6 ♔e7 16 ♖d2 e5 is very comfortable for Black) 14...♔e7 15 ♗d3 ♘f6 16 0-0 ♖hd8 17 e4 ♘g4 and, although Black went on to lose a long struggle, his control of e5 meant he was fine at this point in E.Sveshnikov-C.Balogh, Warsaw 2005.

White should, though, avoid 11 ♘bd4?! since 11...♘xd4 12 ♖d1 ♗d7 forces a concession: White must either acquiesce to an IQP with 13 cxd4, when 13...♗b4+ 14 ♘d2 ♗c6 gives Black an edge, or give up the bishop-pair after 13 ♘xd4 e5! as he did in D.Baratosi-L.Gonda, Herceg Novi 2006.

11...♘xg5 12 ♗xg5+ f6

No matter where the bishop retreats, Black is quite comfortably placed: 13 ♗e3 ♗xe3 14 fxe3 ♔e7 15 0-0-0 ♘e5 16 ♗e2 ♗d7 17 ♘d4 ♖ac8 18 ♖he1 ♖c5 didn't exactly inspire for White in V.Baklan-E.Sutovsky, European Team Championship, Plovdiv 2003, and even the slightly superior 13 ♗f4!? e5 14 ♗e3 ♗xe3 15 fxe3 ♗d7 16 0-0-0 a6 17 ♘d6 ♔c7 18 ♗e2 ♖hd8 left White unable to do anything more than further trade down towards a draw in F.Vallejo Pons-Z.Efimenko, German League 2003.

After 6 ♘a3 ♘c6 an early queen exchange often occurs, but the resulting positions don't promise White any advantage since Black gains sufficient counterplay with a quick ...♘e4 or ...♘d5.

B4)

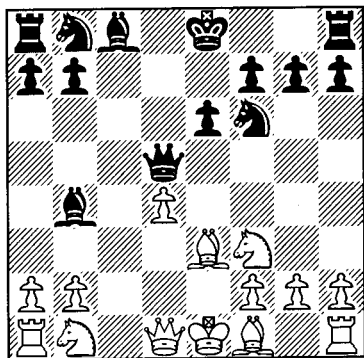
1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 ♕xd5 4 d4 ♘f6 5 ♘f3 e6 6 ♗e3

Now there is a threat to capture on

c5 and Black is pretty much forced into an exchange on d4.

6...cxd4 7 cxd4

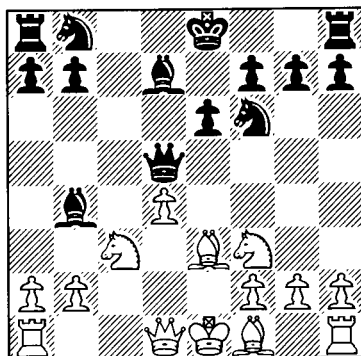
Thus White finally succeeds in gaining an IQP with the modern 6 ♗e3, but his joy will be short lived.

7...♗b4+!

Introduced by Kotov in 1942, this idea remarkably lay dormant until the turn of the century with Black players preferring to contest a standard IQP position after 7...♘c6 8 ♘c3 ♕d6 9 ♗d3 ♗e7. The check on b4 has recently become pretty popular among grandmaster ranks, partly because it takes White away from his standard structure. Rather than play against an IQP, Black intends to exchange bishop for knight on c3, then trade the light-squared bishops and finally play against White's hanging c- and d-pawns. If that all sounds a little familiar, it's because this is how a number of players, and especially Karpov, have handled the 4 e3 Nimzo as Black.

8 ♘c3

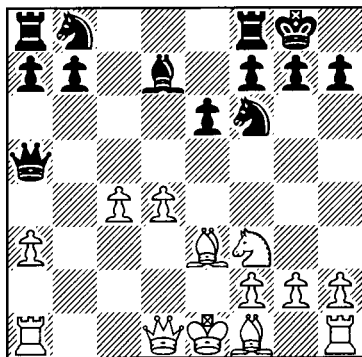
It was probably this option of developing the queen's knight as aggressively as possible which led to 7...♗b4+ being so rare for so long. Instead 8 ♘bd2 avoids a hanging pawn scenario, but White needs to play more actively than this to offset his IQP: 8...0-0 9 a3 ♗xd2+!? 10 ♕xd2 b6 11 ♖c1 ♗a6 12 ♗xa6 ♘xa6 13 0-0 ♖ac8 was very comfortable for Black in I.Khamrakulov-M.Llanes Hurtado, Campillos 2005.

8...♗d7!?

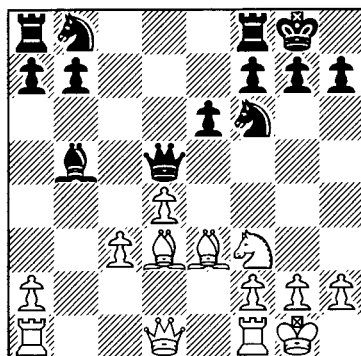
This little wrinkle has recently begun to gain some attention and looks like a reasonable alternative to the main line. That remains 8...0-0 9 ♗d3 (9 ♗e2!? is a tricky alternative, intending to complicate with 9...b6 10 ♘e5, but instead 9...♗d7 is very sensible and can even transpose to our main line after 10 0-0 ♗xc3 11 bxc3 ♗b5 12 ♗xb5 ♕xb5) 9...b6 10 0-0 ♗xc3 11 bxc3 ♗a6 12 ♗xa6 ♘xa6 which is clearly very similar to our main line. The main difference is that by trading bishops on b5, we don't create a small weakness on b6 for White to latch on to with an advance of his a-pawn, and hope to avoid losing time with our queen's knight.

9 ♗d3

Alternatively:

a) 9 ♗e2 ♗b5 10 0-0 ♗xc3 11 bxc3 0-0 transposes to our main line after 12 ♗xb5 ♕xb5. Play was also similar to it following 12 ♖b1 ♗xe2 13 ♕xe2 ♘bd7 14 c4 ♕c6 15 ♖fc1 ♖ac8 16 ♗f4 b6 17 h3 ♖fd8 18 ♖b2 h6 19 ♖bc2 in S.Zhigalko-C.Balogh, Warsaw (rapid) 2004, when Black logically continued his policy of offering exchanges with 19...♕e4.

b) 9 a3!? ♗xc3+ 10 bxc3, though rare, might be the critical test of our 8...♗d7 move order. The main point is that Black must now avoid 10...♗b5?? on account of 11 c4 ♗xc4 12 ♗xc4 ♕xc4 13 ♖c1 and the check on c8 wins the game. Much better is to prefer 10...0-0 11 c4 ♕a5+!, disrupting White's development and hoping to still play against the hanging pawns, despite the presence of the light-squared bishops:

a) 12 ♕d2 ♘c6 13 ♕xa5 ♘xa5 14 ♘e5 ♖fd8 is rather unclear, as Rogozenko remarks. Play might continue 15 ♖b1 ♖ac8 16 ♗e2 ♗a4 and now Black should aim to remove the e5-knight with ...♘d7 or ...b6 and ...♘c6.

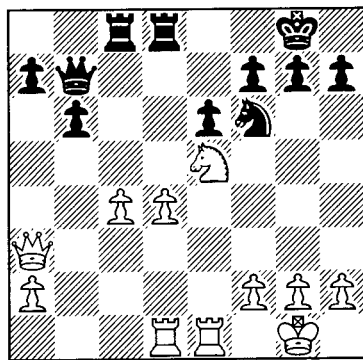
b) 12 ♗d2 ♕a4 13 ♕b1?! has been preferred in the only two tests of 11...♕a5 so far, but such an approach is probably too ambitious. D.Sermek-V.Laznicka, Steinbrunn 2005, continued 13...♗c6 14 ♘e5 (necessary to save White's pawns; both 14 ♗d3?! ♗xf3 15 gxf3 ♘c6 16 ♗c3 ♖ad8 17 ♕d1 ♕xd1+ 18 ♖xd1 ♖d6, as given by Rogozenko, and especially 14 ♗e2?! ♗xf3! 15 ♗xf3 ♘c6 leave White's centre under strong attack) 14...♖d8 (14...♘fd7!? is also possible, intending 15 ♘xc6 ♘xc6 16 ♗c3 ♘b6 with pressure) 15 ♗e3 ♘bd7 16 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 17 f3 ♖ac8 and Black's lead in development balanced White's bishop-pair, with two key ideas being to attack c4 with ...♘e8-d6 and to advance in the centre with ...e5.

9...♗b5 10 0-0 ♗xc3 11 bxc3 0-0

After a logical sequence we reach an important position and one in which White doesn't seem to have any advantage. There isn't yet any real established theory on this position; understanding the few key ideas is of much more importance which is why I have often quoted game references well into the middlegame.

Black would clearly like to occupy the c4-square, but is unlikely to be allowed to. Indeed White usually lands up with pawns on c4 and d4 which need to be kept in check; a d5-advance, particularly if it opens up White's dark-squared bishop, can be quite awkward. Thus Black needs to keep the hanging pawns under restraint, taking care as well not to allow White's dark-squared bishop too much activity, but should he play quite sensibly he is assured of quite a comfortable game. Patience is often the key word which both players need to remember: White would like to play as actively as possible, but unlike in an IQP structure, he cannot mount that quick an attack; Black, for his part, must aim to slowly exchange pieces, gradually revealing the weakness of the hanging pawns.

12 ♗xb5

As Black has avoided having his queen's knight dragged out to a6, it makes sense to cause him to lose time with his queen instead. Furthermore, the alternatives are rather pleasant for Black:

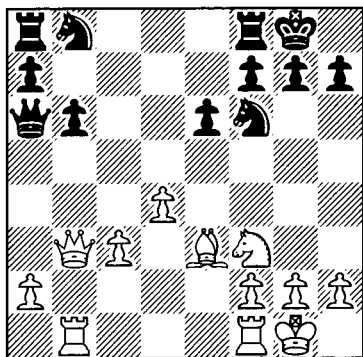
a) 12 ♖b1 ♗xd3 13 ♕xd3 b6 14 c4 ♕e4! (without the queens White will struggle to generate enough activity with his hanging pawns which are, of course, a long-term weakness) 15 ♕a3 ♘bd7 16 ♖fe1 ♖fc8 17 ♗g5 ♕b7 18 ♗xf6!? (with Black's knights harmoniously placed on f6 and d7, the white bishop was struggling to find a good role, but this decision is still quite radical: generalizing a little, each exchange of pieces further weakens the hanging pawns by reducing White's activity) 18...♘xf6 19 ♘e5 ♖d8 20 ♖bd1 ♖ac8 reached a not atypical type of position in M.Stolz-V.Laznicka, Legnica 2004.

After 21 ♕e3, Laznicka rejected 21...♘d7 presumably because he judged the simplification arising after 22 d5 ♘xe5 23 ♕xe5 ♕d7 24 ♕e2 to be rather drawish, preferring 21...h6!? when White correctly sought activity with 22 ♕f4 ♕a6 23 g4! leading to a rather unclear and unbalanced situation.

b) 12 ♘e5 ♗xd3 13 ♕xd3 ♖d8 14 ♖fd1 ♘bd7 15 ♘xd7 ♖xd7 16 c4 ♕a5 was seen in S.Sommer-B.Muhren, Kusadasi 2006. Quite often a trade of knights is favourable for Black since he can play to eventually attack White's hanging pawns with his knight. In such a situation White thus needs to keep on as many major pieces as possible and to try to activate his bishop. White is also helped by the fact that it is not so easy to make progress as Black, pleasant though his position is: c4 and d4 can usually be defended and so Black may well need to consider

arranging ...b5 (to gain the d5-square) or even a ...♘d7 and ...e5 break.

12...♛xb5 13 ♖b1 ♛a6

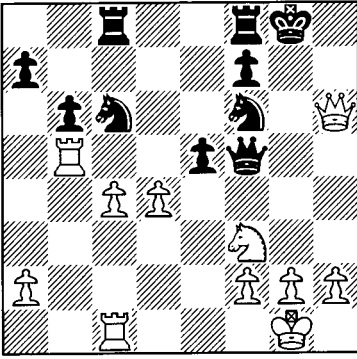
The standard choice, losing some time with the queen, but keeping d7 free for the knight. However, I'm not convinced that 13...♛d7!? is necessarily so bad; for example, 14 c4 (14 ♗g5 ♘d5 15 ♕d3 ♘c6 16 c4 ♘de7 keeps the pawns under control for the time being) 14...♘c6 15 h3 (15 ♗g5!? can be met by 15...♘e4 or even by 15...♖fd8!? 16 d5 exd5 17 ♗xf6 gxf6 18 cxd5 ♛xd5 19 ♕xd5 ♖xd5 20 ♖xb7 ♖a5! when the game is heading for a draw, despite Black's split kingside) 15...b6 16 ♕e2 ♖fd8 17 ♖fd1 would have been acceptable enough for Black in A.Riemens-T.Boguslavsky, Vlissingen 2004, had he now prevented ♗g5 with 17...h6.

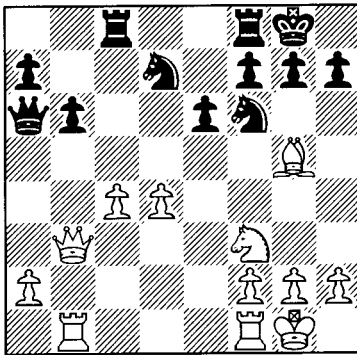
14 ♕b3 b6

Thus White has forced ...b6 after all, but whether he really wanted to bring his queen to b3 is not so clear. It is not that bad a square, and the queen can easily be redeployed, but White must watch out for Black quickly targeting the key c4-square with ...♘c6-a5.

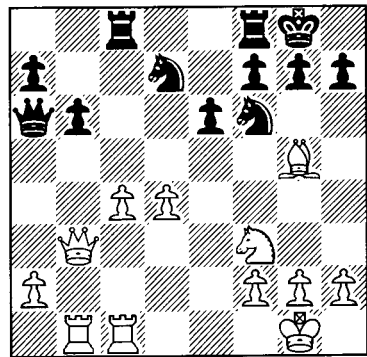
15 ♗g5!

Once again probably the most accurate:

a) 15 ♘e5 ♖c8 (15...♘bd7!? 16 ♘xd7 ♘xd7, lining up ...e5, also deserves attention, A.Burtasova-L.Bensdorp, Kusadasi 2006) 16 f4?! (very committal; leading c3 authority Pavasovic preferred 16 ♖fc1 ♘c6 17 ♘c4! in D.Pavasovic-R.Ruck, Zalaegerszeg 2004, but this was only enough to draw in view of 17...♘e7 18 ♘e5 ♘c6 19 ♘c4) 16...♘c6 17 ♖f3 ♘d5! (prudent; 17...♘e4 18 ♘xf7!? ♚xf7 19 f5 would have been tricky, although perhaps this isn't any more than rather unclear after 19...♖e8! 20 fxe6+ ♚g8 21 e7+ ♚h8 22 ♕d5 ♛d3 23 ♕xc6 ♛xb1+ 24 ♖f1 ♛xa2 25 ♕xe4 ♛a3 26 ♗g5 h6) 18 ♗d2 ♛e2!? 19 ♖f2 ♛h5 20 ♖e1 ♘a5 21 ♕b5?! f6! 22 g4 ♛e8 23 ♕xe8+ ♖xe8 24 c4 ♘xf4 25 ♖xf4 fxe5 26 dxe5 ♘c6 was the instructive course of Y.Afek-K.Landa, Vlissingen 2005; a model performance from Black since such an ending is always promising for him due to the weakness of both e5 and c4.

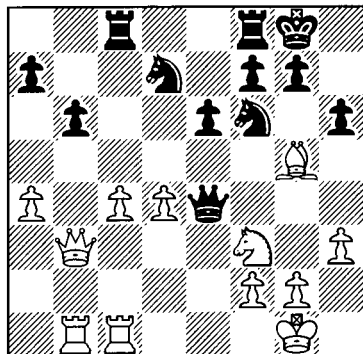
b) 15 c4 ♘c6!? (covering f6 with 15...♘bd7 was a safer alternative) 16 ♖fc1 ♖ac8 17 ♕d3 h6 18 ♕d2 saw White trying to confuse the issue with a possible sacrifice on h6 in G.Kuba-C.Balogh, Zemplinska Sirava 2004. Indeed 18...♛a5 (18...♘e7!? heading for f5 or g6 would have been less provocative when Black can meet 19 ♗xh6 with 19...gxh6 20 ♕xh6 ♘h7! since 21 ♘g5 ♘xg5 22 ♕xg5+ ♘g6 23 h4 ♚h7 24 h5 ♘h8 keeps everything covered) 19 ♗xh6!? gxh6 20 ♕xh6 ♛f5 21 ♖b5 e5

was the continuation when 22 ♘xe5! ♘e4 (or 22...♘xd4!? 23 ♘d7 ♘xd7 24 ♖xf5 ♘xf5 25 ♕h3 ♖c5 when Black has a rook and two knights for White's queen and two pawns) 23 f3 ♕f6 seems to fizzle out to a draw after 24 ♕e3 ♘d6 25 ♘d7 ♕xd4 26 ♕xd4 ♘xd4 27 ♖g5+ ♔h8 28 ♖d1 ♘xf3+ 29 gxf3 ♖g8.

15...♘bd7 16 c4 ♖ac8

17 ♖fc1

Swinging both rooks to the queenside is logical as White intends to advance his a-pawn, but he has also tried 17 ♘d2 when 17...♕a5!? (trying to exploit White's slightly loose pieces, but 17...♕b7 might well be an improvement; 18 ♖fe1 h6 19 ♗f4 ♖fd8, for example, should be fine for Black who might regroup with ...♘f8-g6, while ♕g3 is now well met by ...♘h5) 18 ♕g3 ♔h8 19 ♕h4 saw White probing the kingside in L.Vajda-C.Balogh, Tusnad 2005. However, Black remains very solid here and after 19...♕f5 20 h3, could have carried out a thematic break with 20...e5!. The aim of this is to highlight the weakness of c4 should White have to advance with d5; a move which may also allow Black to make use of the c5-square and/or to later arrange an undermining ...b5. White would like not to have to have his pawns fixed thus and so might prefer to win a pawn, but both 21 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 22 ♖b5 ♖fd8 23 ♖xe5 ♕d3 and 21 g4 ♕g6 22 dxe5 ♘e4 23 ♘xe4 ♕xe4 reveal his gains to only be temporary, unlike his long-term weaknesses.

17...♕b7

Black can also double immediately with 17...♖c6 18 ♖c2 ♖fc8 as he did in J.Shaw-D.Pavasovic, Calvia Olympiad 2004 (two great c3 Sicilian experts in opposition here), but after 19 ♖bc1,

19...h6 20 ♗f4 ♕a5 (Rogozenko) was correct and fine for Black, whereas 19...♘e4 20 ♗f4 ♘d6?! 21 d5! exd5 22 ♘d4 cost Pavasovic the exchange for insufficient compensation.

18 a4 ♕e4 19 h3 h6

Black has unravelled and the position remained roughly level after 20 ♗d2 ♖c7 in Y.Nepomniashchy-K.Landa, St Petersburg 2004. Rogozenko has suggested that White might have preferred 20 ♗e3 ♖c7 (he doesn't, however, mention 20...e5!? which looks like a reasonable alternative; for example, 21 a5 exd4 22 ♗xd4 ♖fe8 23 axb6 axb6 sees the weaknesses of c4 and b6 balance each other out) 21 a5!?, although this doesn't seem too bad for Black after 21...bxa5 22 ♖a1 ♖b8, as he mentions, when Black will follow up with 23...♘b6.

7...♗b4+ looks like an excellent riposte to 6 ♗e3 and the wrinkle 8...♗d7!? may well further surprise white players. The resulting hanging pawn positions are pretty complex, but appear to offer Black a fully satisfactory game so long as he is patient.

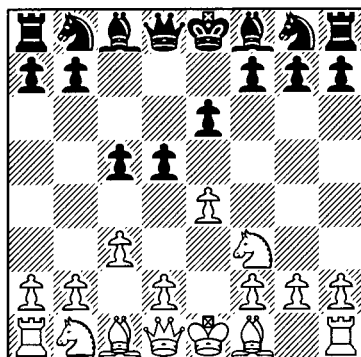
C)

We now come to consider the important practical issue of how to reach our 2 c3 Sicilian lines when White cunningly prefers 2 ♘f3 before 3 c3.

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6

Fans of 2...♘c6 are relatively untroubled by 3 c3, at least so long as they are happy with one of our systems. Of course, 3...d5 4 exd5 ♕xd5 5 d4 ♗g4 is Line A, while 5...♘f6 is discussed at the beginning of Line B.

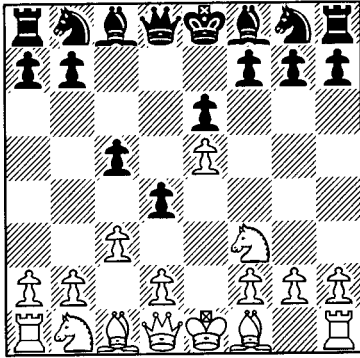
One problem for c3 Sicilian fans who might be tempted to play 2 ♘f3 is 2...d6 when 3 c3 ♘f6 takes play away from 2 c3 Sicilian lines. White has a few set-ups here, albeit none which should greatly trouble Black, but I'm afraid that this variation falls outside our scope.

3 c3 d5

4 e5!?

A tricky independent try, rather than transpose to Line B with 4 exd5 ♕xd5 5 d4 ♘f6.

4...d4!?

And this is a tricky independent response. There's nothing wrong with

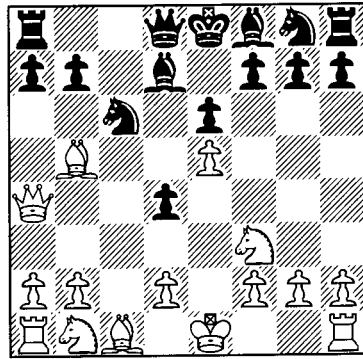
4...♘c6, but then Black must be happy to play the Advance French after 5 d4 (and 5 ♘a3!? is also an option; see the move order 2 ♘a3 e6 3 c3 d5 4 e5 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 in Line B of Chapter Nine).

After the space-gaining text, White usually chooses one of:

C1: 5 cxd4
C2: 5 ♗d3

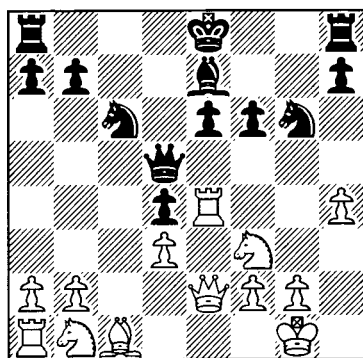
Sometimes White prefers 5 ♗b5+ ♗d7 6 ♗xd7+ ♕xd7, but after 7 cxd4 (an independent try is 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 c4!?, but here Black has a number of options, including 8...♘ge7 9 d3 ♘g6 10 ♖e1 0-0-0!? 11 a3 f6! which led to a double-edged game in T.Bae-P.Gayson, British League 2005) 7...cxd4 we've transposed to Line C1.

C1)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 c3 d5 4 e5 d4 5 cxd4 cxd4 6 ♗b5+

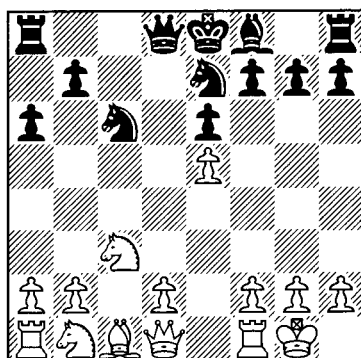
A critical test of Black's system since now White gets to win the d-pawn. He can also capture it with 6 ♕a4+ ♘c6 7 ♗b5 ♗d7

8 ♗xc6?! (a more prudent choice is 8 0-0, although this should be fine for Black; one good option is 8...♗c5, but probably even better is Jozsef Horvath's 8...♘ge7 9 ♘a3 a6, after which 10 ♗e2 is well met by 10...d3! and 10 ♗xc6 ♘xc6 11 ♕c2 ♘b4 12 ♕e4 ♗c6! 13 ♕xd4 ♗xf3 14 ♕xd8+ ♖xd8 15 gxf3 ♘d3 was also promising for Black in S.Farago-J.Horvath, Budapest 1995) 8...♗xc6 9 ♕xd4, although clearly this doesn't win a pawn as such. Black can immediately win back his pawn on g2, but I prefer 9...♗xf3! 10 ♕xd8+ ♖xd8 11 gxf3 ♘e7 with excellent compensation in view of White's shattered structure. Indeed Black will shortly regain the pawn, leaving White's position riddled with weaknesses: for example, 12 ♘c3 (or 12 b3?! ♘c6 13 f4 ♘b4 14 ♔d1 ♘d3 and White's position was extremely grim in N.Jactel-P.Tregubov, Paris 1999) 12...♘g6 13 d4 (the best way of losing back the pawn) 13...♖xd4 14 ♗e3 ♖c4 15 ♗xa7 ♘xe5 16 ♔e2 ♗b4 and Black was slightly better in A.Vajda-V.Doncea, Bucharest 2004.

6...♗d7 7 ♘xd4?!

Risky in view of the following accurate response. A better and fairly aggressive approach is 7 ♗xd7+ ♕xd7 8 d3 ♘c6 9 0-0 ♘ge7 (preparing to tie White down to the weakness on e5; likewise Black will usually find that d4 comes under some pressure) 10 ♖e1!? (fairly rare, but the most testing continuation and one endorsed by Jeroen Bosch in an *SOS* article; instead 10 ♗f4 ♘g6 sidelines White's bishop after which 11 ♗g3 ♗e7 12 ♖e1 0-0 13 ♖e4 ♖fd8 14 ♕e2 ♖ac8 15 ♘bd2 ♘b4! gave Black reasonable counterplay in S.Kosmo-P.Tregubov, European Club Cup, Fuegen 2006) 10...♘g6 11 ♖e4, after which 11...♕d5 12 ♕e2 (Z.Zhao-A.Kulashko, Gold Coast 1999) 12...♗e7 13 h4!? f5! 14 exf6 gxf6

15 ♘a3 (15 ♖xe6? ♘ce5 traps the rook and White should also avoid 15 h5?! ♕xh5 16 ♖xe6? ♘ge5) 15...h5 is rather unclear; capturing on e6 still costs White the exchange, but otherwise Black is set to play ...e5, followed by going long.

7...♗xb5

Best. Black is ill advised to get involved in 7...♕g5?! 8 ♘f3 ♕xg2 9 ♖g1 ♕h3 10 ♘c3 when he will probably be punished for his greed.

8 ♘xb5 ♘c6 9 0-0 a6 10 ♘5c3 ♘ge7!

Continuing to develop since there's no hurry to regain the pawn. Unlike after the immediate recapture or 10...♕d4, White now struggles to generate sufficient activity to offset his overextended structure.

11 ♘a3

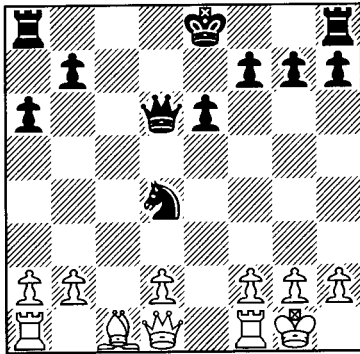
Relatively best. White has tried a number of alternatives, but they all give Black a good game: for example, 11 ♖e1 ♘g6 12 b3 ♗e7 13 ♘a3 0-0 14 ♗b2 ♘gxe5 15 d4 ♘g6 (the IQP gives Black a small edge, but White's thematic attempt to liquidate it now makes matters even worse) 16 d5? ♘b4! highlighted White's poor co-ordination and forced him to give up the d5-pawn in A.Kharlov-F.Gheorghiu, Bern 1992; and 11 d4 ♕xd4 12 ♕xd4 ♘xd4 13 ♘d2 ♘ec6 14 f4 h5!? was at least very comfortable for Black in B.Heberla-A.Volokitin, Artek 2000.

11...♘f5

Again Black wisely rejects the pawn in favour of improving his pieces; the e5-weakness won't run away.

12 ♘c2 ♗c5 13 ♘e4

Bosch has pointed out that White should prefer to fight for equality with 13 ♘e3. Perhaps he can equalize, but I'd still prefer to be Black after, for example, 13...0-0!? (13...♛d3 is simpler and another good option) 14 ♘e4 (or 14 f4 ♛d3 15 ♕e2 ♛xe2 16 ♘xe2 ♘b4 and White faces ongoing problems developing his queenside) 14...♗e7 15 ♘xf5 (Black also gains a firm bind on the position after 15 f4 ♛d4 16 ♘c3 ♖fd8) 15...exf5 16 ♘g3 g6 when Black retains good compensation, especially in the case of 17 f4 ♛b6+ 18 ♔h1 f6! 19 exf6 ♗xf6.

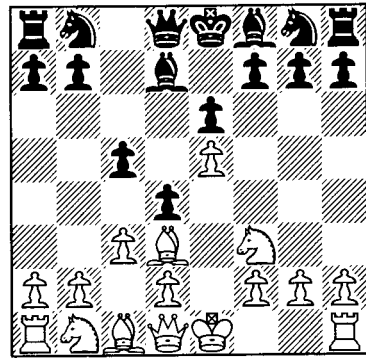
13...♗d4 14 ♘d6+ ♘xd6 15 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 16 exd6 ♛xd6

Black has regained the pawn and stands better due to his superior structure and d-file pressure, E.Torre-R.Hübner, Novi Sad Olympiad 1990.

C2)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 c3 d5 4 e5 d4 5 ♗d3

A more positional plan. White wants to bring his bishop to e4, exerting pressure on both flanks.

5...♗d7!?

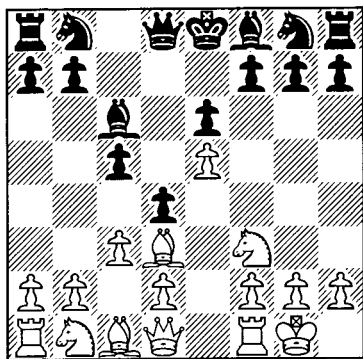
Black's main move remains 5...♘c6, but I much prefer the text, preparing to challenge on the h1-a8 diagonal. Furthermore, this gambit (not that White usually accepts the pawn) has been employed by a number of Sicilian experts, including Judit Polgar, Andrei Sokolov and Sune Berg Hansen.

6 0-0

Standard, but occasionally White tries to prevent Black's bishop from being the first on to the key diagonal:

a) 6 cxd4 cxd4 (another good approach in this rare position is 6...♗c6!? and after 7 ♘c3 ♘e7 8 0-0 cxd4 9 ♘b5 ♘g6 10 ♗xg6 hxg6 11 ♘bxd4 g5! 12 ♘xc6 ♘xc6 13 ♕a4 ♗b4 Black enjoyed good compensation in L.McShane-S.B.Hansen, Copenhagen 2003) 7 ♘xd4 ♛g5 8 ♕e2 (the difference from Line C1 is that after 8 ♘f3 ♛xg2 9 ♖g1 ♛h3 White's bishop is misplaced on d3 and Black has sufficient counterplay following 10 ♘c3 ♘c6 11 ♖g3 ♛h5) 8...♘c6 9 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 10 ♗e4 ♘e7 11 ♘c3 ♛xe5

12 d4!? (this doesn't especially convince, but otherwise Black has a pretty comfortable game) 12...♕xd4 13 ♗e3 ♕e5 didn't give White quite enough for his pawn in G.Gutman-C.Balogh, Cappelle la Grande 2007.

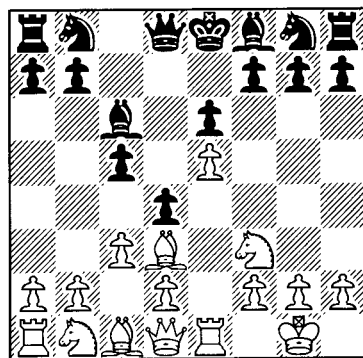
b) 6 ♗e4 ♗c6 7 ♕e2 (or 7 d3 ♗xe4!? 8 dxe4 ♘c6 9 ♕b3 ♕b6 10 ♘a3 ♕xb3 11 axb3 0-0-0 12 ♘c4 with a rather complex position in G.Wall-P.Vavra, German League 2004, and now the prophylactic 12...h6 makes a lot of sense; this seems quite playable for Black, although he can also consider the simpler 7...♘e7) 7...♘e7 8 d3 ♗xe4 9 ♕xe4 dxc3! (the simplest approach; Black prepares to make good use of the d5-square) 10 bxc3 ♕d5 11 ♕e2?! ♘bc6 12 ♘a3 0-0-0! 13 ♘b5 ♘g6 left White under a bit of pressure in J.Timman-L.Ljubojevic, Dutch League 1999.

6...♗c6

7 ♖e1

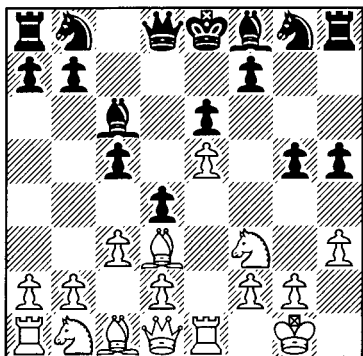
Once again White has a few alternatives:

a) 7 ♕e2 ♘e7 (bringing the knight to g6 is especially tempting with White's queen on e2, but, just like in our main line, 7...g5!? also deserves consideration) 8 ♗e4 ♗xe4 9 ♕xe4 ♘bc6 10 d3 dxc3 11 ♘xc3 (or 11 bxc3 ♕d5 with rough equality) 11...♘f5 12 ♗e3 ♕d7 13 ♖fd1 ♖d8 14 ♖ac1 ♗e7 gave Black a useful hold on d4 in S.Buchal-M.Cornette, European Championship, Dresden 2007.

b) 7 ♘a3 ♘e7 8 cxd4 (or 8 ♘c2 dxc3 9 dxc3 ♘d7 10 ♗f4 ♘g6 11 ♗g3 ♕b6 with useful pressure against e5 and b2, J.Shaw-K.Arakhamia Grant, Scotland 2002) 8...cxd4 9 ♘c2 ♘g6 10 ♖e1 ♘f4!? 11 ♗f1 d3 was quite unclear in S.Vysochin-M.Brodsky, Swidnica 2000, and after 12 ♘cd4 ♕d5 13 ♘xc6 ♘xc6 14 g3 ♘e2+! 15 ♗xe2 dxe2 16 ♕xe2 ♗c5 Black had sufficient compensation for the pawn.

c) 7 b3 hopes to develop without having to move the d3-bishop, but after 7...♘e7 8 cxd4 ♘g6 9 ♖e1 cxd4 10 ♗a3 ♗xa3 11 ♘xa3 ♘f4 12 ♗e4 d3! 13 ♗xc6+ ♘xc6 14 ♘b5 0-0 Black's extra space gave her the edge in M.Illescas Cordoba-J.Polgar, Madrid 1994.

7...♘e7

Bringing the knight to g6 is logical,

but Black can also fight for the initiative with 7...g5!?, as he did in O.Salmensuu-J.Horvath, Helsinki 2001: 8 h3 (or 8 ♔f1 g4 9 ♘g1 ♘h6 10 ♗e4 ♗xe4 11 ♖xe4 ♘c6 12 d3 dxc3 13 ♘xc3 ♖g8 14 ♘ge2 ♘f5 and Black had good central control in G.Wall-J.Rowson, British League 2004) 8...h5

9 ♘h2! (a more critical response than Wall's; Black now responds in kind) 9...g4! 10 hxg4 hxg4 11 ♕xg4 dxc3 12 ♗e4 ♘h6 13 ♕f4 ♗xe4 14 ♕xe4 cxb2 15 ♗xb2 ♘c6 16 ♘a3 ♕d7 with a very unclear position, albeit one in which Black has a number of quite useful positional trumps.

8 b4!?

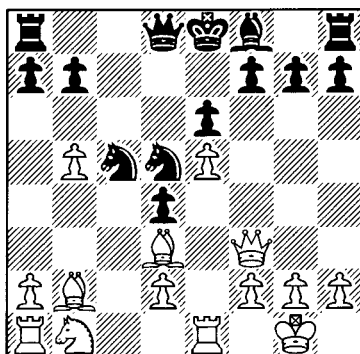
Now it's White's turn to try and unbalance the position. The alternative is 8 ♘a3 ♘g6 when Black should have quite reasonable counterplay: for example, 9 ♗xg6 (or 9 g3 ♘d7!? 10 cxd4 cxd4 11 ♘xd4 ♘dxe5 12 ♘xc6 ♘xc6 13 ♗e4, as in B.Sadeghi-J.Halbritter, Bayern 2003, and now 13...♗e7 would have been about equal; Black's 9th was a little radical, but is a good way to sidestep White's idea of h4-h5) 9...hxg6 10 cxd4 cxd4 11 d3 ♗b4! 12 ♗g5 ♕d7 13 ♘d2 ♕d5 left Black slightly for choice due to his pressure against e5 and g2 in A.Grosar-P.Schlosser, Graz 1993.

8...cxb4 9 cxb4

White later preferred 9 ♘xd4?!, but after 9...♘g6 10 ♗c4 ♗e7 11 a3 bxc3 12 dxc3 0-0 his somewhat inferior structure left him struggling in B.Rechel-J.Emms, British League 2004.

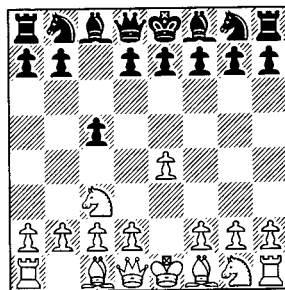
9...♗xf3!

Now Black is in time to use the d5-outpost to gain sufficient counterplay against White's extended queenside.

10 ♕xf3 ♘d5 11 b5 ♘d7 12 ♗b2 ♘c5

The position is roughly level; d4 being no weaker than White's queenside. P.Svidler-A.Sokolov, Tivat 1995, continued 13 ♗e4 ♘xe4 14 ♕xe4 ♖c8 15 ♘a3 ♕a5 16 ♕d3 ♗xa3!? 17 ♗xa3 ♘c3 18 dxc3 and before Black could regain his piece with full equality, a draw was agreed.

5 ♗d3 ♗d7 looks like a good option for Black. The plan of bringing the bishop to c6 and the king's knight to g6, thereby attacking e5, is certainly fairly easy to implement.

Chapter Two

Move Order Issues After 2 ♘c3

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3

Once upon a time one tended to know where one stood after 2 ♘c3: White would follow up with a kingside fianchetto, aiming to imitate Smyslov and Spassky's success with the Closed Sicilian. Then White players began to become much more crafty. By the late-eighties, Grand Prix exponents were becoming frustrated with 2 f4 d5 (see Line B1 of Chapter Four) and so began to turn more and more to a 2 ♘c3 move order, intending to follow up with 3 f4. Worse was to come in the shape of players with a broad repertoire who aimed to allow certain lines of the Open Sicilian, while avoiding others with 2 ♘c3. This move order 'trick' remains very popular at grandmaster level; White may, for example, meet 2...d6 with 3 f4, thereby avoiding the Najdorf, but be happy to meet 2...e6 with 3 ♘f3 and 4 d4, transposing to a Taimanov or Kan.

One crucial point to note here is that by no means every opponent has the necessary breadth of experience to play for these move order tricks. Indeed at club level 2 ♘c3 usually still leads to either the Closed Sicilian or to the Grand Prix, although it helps to know one's opponent in advance before deciding on a second move. A Najdorf player, for instance, might be happy after 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 with both 3 g3 and 3 f4, but might well be move ordered by 3 ♘f3.

Let's take a closer look at the impact 2 ♘c3, when followed up with 3 ♘f3 or 3 ♘ge2 and 4 d4, has on the main variations of the Sicilian:

Najdorf players can play 2...d6, but must then be quite well prepared for 3 f4. This variation of the Grand Prix does not promise White a theoretical advantage, but it is tricky and not especially easy to play against in practice. Those who would prefer to avoid such a defensive task should consider instead 2...a6!?, intending 3 ♘f3 d6; a

move order which we'll give some more thought to below.

Dragon exponents are less affected by 2 ♘c3, but may well still like to steer clear of 2...d6. Instead 2...♘c6 should be preferred, intending to slide into a Dragon proper via an Accelerated Dragon move order in the event of 3 ♘f3 g6 4 d4.

Those who prefer to play the **Classical** have the advantage of being able to play ...d6 before ...♘c6 and vice versa. Against 2 ♘c3 they should probably prefer 2...♘c6 when 3 ♘f3 d6 is briefly discussed in Line A3 of Chapter Five.

In the **Sveshnikov** Black meets 2 ♘f3 with 2...♘c6 and so should meet 2 ♘c3 with the same move. Then 3 ♘f3 e5 is the solid approach, but personally I prefer the more dynamic 3...♘f6!?.

Players who play ...e6 systems are generally quite well off against 2 ♘c3, as we will see further in the next three chapters. Following 2 ♘c3 e6 3 ♘f3, 3...♘c6 4 d4 (4 ♗b5 is fairly harmless as Line A1 of Chapter Five demonstrates) 4...cxd4 5 ♘xd4 is a **Taimanov**, 3...a6 4 d4 (4 g3 is also possible when 4...b5 5 ♗g2 ♗b7 transposes to the notes to Black's 3rd move in Line C, below, of this chapter) 4...cxd4 5 ♘xd4 a **Kan**, but things are a little trickier for **Scheveningen** players who should consider both 3...d6 and 3...♘c6, intending 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 d6.

Our Coverage of 2 ♘c3

Having discussed various move orders, it's time to move towards examining some of the theory of the variations which arise after 2 ♘c3. For those happy to play either 2...♘c6 or 2...e6, we examine the Closed Sicilian with 3 g3 in Chapter Three, the Grand Prix Attack with 3 f4 in Chapter Four and White's other options, including move order tricks with 3 ♘f3 and 3 ♘ge2, in Chapter Five. Before we reach those lines, the rest of this chapter is for the benefit of 2 ♘f3 d6 players and especially Najdorf fans.

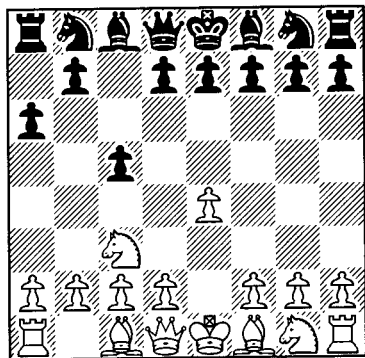
Know the Man!

Before we examine an independent second move approach (2...a6!?), it should be said that if Black knows his opponent he should probably just play the man after 2 ♘c3! A Najdorf devotee up against a regular Closed Sicilian player, for example, can still play 2...♘c6 confident that 3 g3 will follow. Likewise, if White always plays 2 ♘c3 solely as a ruse before following up with 3 ♘f3 and 4 d4, there's nothing wrong with 2...d6. However, should White either be an unknown quantity or a player with a broad repertoire, the Najdorf player should be careful before bashing out a response to 2 ♘c3: they might gamble on 2...♘c6 or prefer something more independent...

2...a6!? - A Tricky Counter Move Order

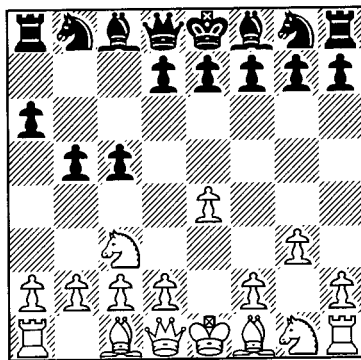
This option is especially useful for Najdorf players, although some Kan, Scheveningen and O'Kelly players may also wish to consider it. The former Russian Champion, Konstantin Landa, is its main exponent, but it has also been employed by Ivanchuk, Lautier

and Sasikiran. Black intends to meet both 3 g3 and 3 f4 with 3...b5, seizing some useful space and retaining full flexibility in the centre.

After 2...a6!? we will consider:

A: 3 g3
B: 3 f4
C: 3 ♘ge2
D: 3 ♘f3

Most tricky move orders do, however, have a small drawback or two and 2...a6 is no exception. White might reply with 3 a4 which is slightly ugly, but does prevent ...b5. Should Black have some experience of ...g6 Closed Sicilian systems this is no problem. After 3...♘c6 4 g3 (or 4 f4 g6 5 ♘f3 ♗g7 and White's most dangerous move, 6 ♗b5, has been ruled out; Black can also play 4...e6 5 ♘f3 d5 à la Chapter Four) 4...g6 5 ♗g2 ♗g7 6 d3 d6 the inclusion of ...a6 and a4 is generally considered to favour Black: he might have to play ...♖b8 to force through ...b5, but it is usually Black who profits more from the resulting opening of the a-file; White usually aims to attack on the kingside, rather than try and contest the queenside.

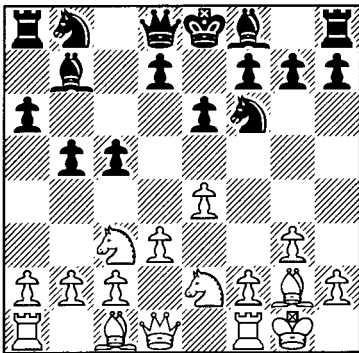
Another good option against 3 a4 is 3...e6, intending 4 g3 d5 and 4 f4 d5 (compare, respectively, with Line B of Chapter Three and Line A2 of Chapter Four). Finally, those who like something very offbeat might wish to consider the rather rare 3...b6!?: for example, 4 g3 ♗b7 5 ♗g2 e6 6 ♘ge2 ♘f6 7 0-0 d5!? 8 exd5 ♘xd5 9 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 10 ♗xd5 ♕xd5 11 ♘f4 ♕b7 12 d4 cxd4 13 ♕xd4 ♘c6 14 ♕e4 ♗e7 was fine for Black in B.Rogulj-C.Horvath, Pula 2001, and should be compared with note 'b1' to White's 6th move in Line A, below.

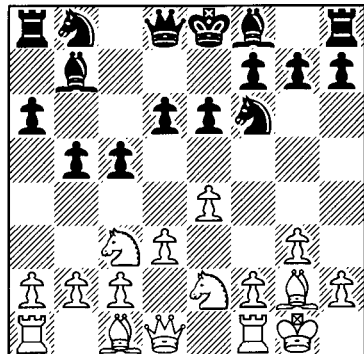
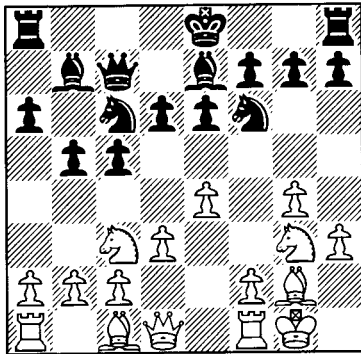
A)
1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 a6 3 g3 b5

The consistent follow-up and it is quite possible that some Closed Sicilian fans won't feel too comfortable here, being much more used to facing set-ups with an early ...g6 (as we explore in our next chapter).

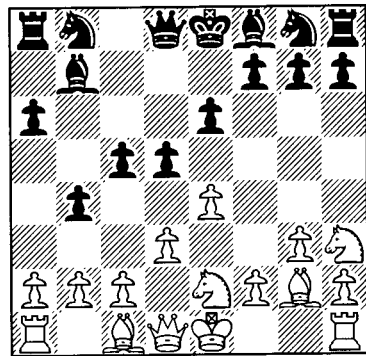
4 ♗g2 ♗b7 5 d3 e6 6 f4

White's main move, logically seizing some space. He can also try:

a) 6 ♗e3 works well against a kingside fianchetto, but is rather unconvincing here: 6...♘f6 (preparing ...d5; the immediate 6...d5 7 exd5 exd5?! should be avoided on account of 8 d4, fixing Black's light-squared bishop on the wrong side of the under-pressure d5-pawn) 7 h3 (ruling out ...♘g4 like this is a common ploy in the Closed, but there was no need for it just yet) 7...d5 8 exd5 ♘xd5 9 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 10 ♘f3 ♘d7 11 0-0 ♗e7 gave Black comfortable equality in V.Samolins-E.Kengis, Riga 2006.

b) 6 ♘ge2 is a more flexible choice, although after 6...♘f6 7 0-0 Black has a reasonable choice:

b1) 7...d5!? prepares to free the black position through exchanges. It appears quite playable, but is a little risky since White can try and use his superior development to seize the initiative. Following 8 exd5 (the only real try for an advantage; 8 ♗g5 is well met by 8...d4) 8...♘xd5 9 ♘xd5 (9 a4!? is untried, but looks like a reasonable attempt to force a weakness; however, Black can keep everything together with 9...♘xc3 10 ♘xc3 ♗xg2 11 ♔xg2 ♘c6!, intending 12 axb5 axb5 13 ♖xa8 ♕xa8 14 ♕f3 ♕a6) 9...♗xd5 10 ♗xd5 ♕xd5 quite a critical position was reached in A.Krapivin-I.Popov, Lvov 2006. Black is ready to complete his development with ...♗e7 and ...0-0, after which his extra queenside space becomes quite a useful asset, as is a quick manoeuvre of the knight to the strong d4-square. White thus needs to act quickly, but after 11 ♘f4 ♕b7!? (continuing in ambitious vein by playing for a quick ...♘c6-d4; 11...♕c6 followed by ...♘d7 was a safer option) 12 ♕h5! ♘c6 13 ♖e1 (13 ♘xe6!? might have been tried since 13...g6 14 ♕d5 fxe6 15 ♖e1 gives White reasonable play for the piece as it's not especially easy for Black to unravel after something like 15...♖b8!? 16 ♖xe6+ ♘e7) 13...0-0-0! 14 ♗e3 g6 15 ♕f3 ♘d4 the forced exchanges on b7 and d4 gave Popov the edge.

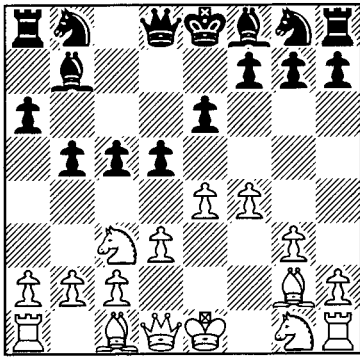
b2) 7...d6 retains more tension and is also important as it can arise too from Line C.

White's only real plan is to advance on the kingside: 8 h3 ♘c6 (ruling out g4 with Ribli's 8...h5!? is yet another way to handle this variation, but 8...♗e7?! 9 e5! is probably best avoided) 9 g4!? (9 ♗e3 ♗e7 10 a3 ♕c7 is quite comfortable for Black with his typical Sicilian piece deployment; J.Claesen-A.Kveinys, Lubniewice 1998, continued 11 ♘f4?! h5! 12 h4 ♘e5 13 ♗h3 ♘fg4 14 ♗d2 and now Kiril Georgiev's 14...g6! would have emphasized White's lack of a plan) 9...♗e7 10 ♘g3 ♕c7

11 f4 0-0-0 (Black doesn't have to commit his king just yet; Georgiev's 11...h6!? 12 ♗e3 ♘d7 is a good alternative, leading to a complex situation in which those with some experienced of double-edged Scheveningen positions may be happy to castle short) 12 a4 b4 13 ♘ce2 g6! saw Black responding prophylactically and sensibly in H.Sobura-J.Kiedrowicz, Gdynia 1986. White should now have fought for the initiative with the committal 14 f5!?, whereas 14 c3 h5 15 g5 ♘d7 16 h4 f5! saw Black beginning to gain the upper hand.

c) 6 ♘h3!? is directed against an early ...d5 since White can now counter with e5 and f4, as well as with an exchange on d5 and ♘f4. Black can, though, still play for that central advance: 6...b4!? (6...♘f6 7 0-0 d6 is again a reasonable alternative; for example, 8 f4 ♗e7 9 g4 ♘c6 10 g5 ♘d7 11 f5!? ♘d4 12 fxe6 ♘xe6! was rather double-edged in Y.Balashov-Ni Hua, Moscow 2004) 7 ♘e2 d5

8 0-0 (instead 8 exd5 ♗xd5 9 ♗xd5 ♕xd5 10 0-0 ♘c6 11 ♘ef4 ♕d7 doesn't seem to allow any nasty sacrifices on e6; White also hasn't tried 8 e5 quite possibly because 8...♘c6 9 f4 gives Black a reasonable choice between 9...h5 and 9...f6!?) 8...dxe4! (simplest since after 9 ♘g5 ♘f6 there's no way for White to further increase the tension down the long diagonal) 9 dxe4 ♕xd1 10 ♖xd1 ♘f6 11 e5!? ♗xg2 12 ♔xg2 ♘fd7 13 f4 ♗e7 was about equal in S.Sievers-K.Landa, German League 2002; Black's queenside play and idea of ...♘b6-d5 counterbalance White's outpost on e4.

d) Finally, it might look a little unnatural to block the f-pawn, but 6 ♘f3

is probably best met by 6...d6 with a transposition to Line D.

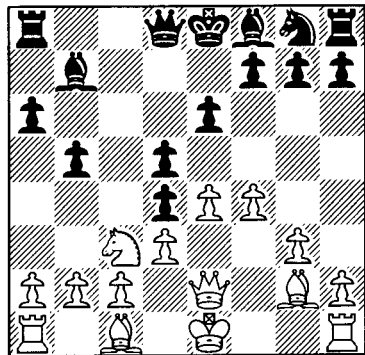
6...d5!

Countering in the centre like this is one of the main points behind Black's set-up. The text move quickly takes White away from his standard Closed Sicilian set-ups and is probably Black's best, although he can also consider both Sasikiran's 6...g6 and 6...d6, as used by Kengis among others.

7 e5

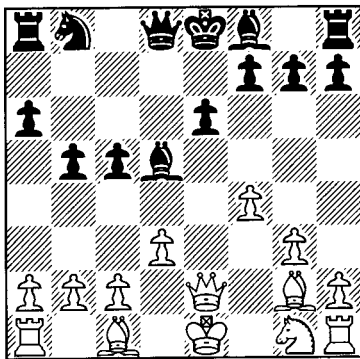
White's most popular choice, and one recommended in Emms' *Attacking with 1 e4*, but not every opponent will like to close the centre so early. Alternatively:

a) 7 f5?! was apparently tried in J.Coll Frances-J.Granda Zuniga, Tarragona 2006, but I can't see anything wrong with 7...d4 followed by capturing on f5; for example, 8 ♘b1 exf5 9 ♘h3 fxe4 10 ♘g5 ♘f6 11 ♘d2 ♗e7 12 ♘dxe4 ♘xe4 13 ♘xe4 ♘c6 and White's compensation is insufficient.

b) 7 ♘f3 b4 8 ♘e2 (Black was also fine after 8 ♘a4!? ♘f6 9 exd5 ♘xd5 10 0-0 ♗e7 11 c4 bxc3 12 bxc3 0-0 13 ♖b1 ♗c6 in S.Ivanov-V.Popov, St Petersburg 2002) 8...dxe4 9 ♘g5 is another creative, but not especially convincing idea. After 9...♘f6 10 ♘xe4 (or 10 0-0 c4! 11 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 12 dxe4 ♗c5+ – Solak – with an easy game for Black) 10...♘xe4 11 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 12 dxe4 ♕xd1+ 13 ♔xd1 ♘d7 a complex queenless middlegame arose in J.Renteria Becerra-J.Sunye Neto, Bogota 1992, but by continuing actively Black was most certainly not worse; not only is ...a5, ...c4 and ...♘c5 a plan, but so too is the undermining ...h5-h4.

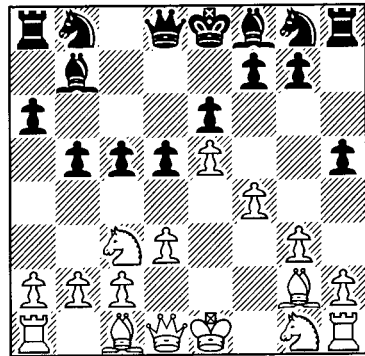
c) 7 ♕e2 ♘c6 (the most dynamic, whereas 7...b4 8 ♘d1 dxe4?! 9 dxe4 ♘f6 10 e5! ♗xg2 11 ♕xg2 ♘d5 12 ♘e3 with an edge to White in E.Gasanov-A.Areshchenko, Kramatorsk 2002, is the sort of thing Black should avoid; however, 7...d4!? is a principled and good alternative which quickly led to an unclear reversed King's Indian situation after 8 ♘d1 ♘c6 9 ♘f3 ♘f6 10 0-0 ♗e7 11 ♘f2 0-0 12 g4 c4! in J.Houska-A.Kuzmin, Gibraltar 2004) 8 ♘f3 ♘d4!? 9 ♘xd4 cxd4

10 ♘d1 dxe4 11 dxe4 (the most com-

complex; 11 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 12 ♕xe4?! ♖c8 gives Black plenty of early activity) 11...♖c8 12 0-0 ♘f6 13 ♘f2 was the unbalanced course of P.Harikrishna-Bu Xiangzhi, Tiayuan 2005, and now Black should have employed Rowson's recommendation of 13...♕c7 when 14 ♗d2 ♕c4 15 ♘d3 ♗e7! would have been fine for him.

d) 7 exd5 ♘f6 (Black wants to recapture with a piece on d5, thereby keeping the long diagonal open) 8 ♕e2 (a better try might be 8 ♘f3!? which avoids exchanges, although 8...♘xd5 9 ♘e4 ♘c6 10 c3 ♗e7 11 0-0 ♕c7 12 ♕e2 0-0 didn't bring White any advantage in B.Roselli Mailhe-H.Van Riemsdijk, Pinamar 2001) 8...♘xd5 9 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 is a position which has received some testing and is quite comfortable for Black: White can only really pose problems after piece exchanges on d5 when he can follow up with ♘e2/h3-f4.

Here, for example, 10 ♘f3 ♗e7 11 0-0 0-0 12 c4 (a necessary advance; 12 ♗e3 ♘c6 13 ♕f2?! c4! 14 dxc4 bxc4 15 c3 ♖b8 gave Black an edge due to his b-file pressure in C.Billing-K.Landa, Bad Wiessee 2005) 12...♗b7 13 ♗e3 ♘d7 14 ♖ad1 ♕c7 15 b3 ♖ac8 was rather comfortable for Black, although White also remained quite solid in T.Ringoir-M.Dutreeuw, Le Touquet 2006.

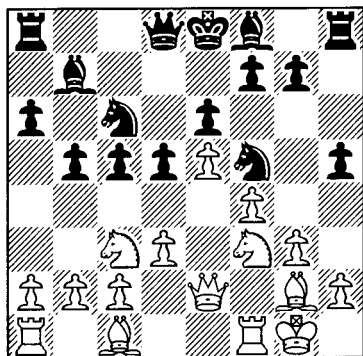
Returning to 7 e5:

7...h5!

A strong concept, borrowed from the Gurgenidze system, with which Black aims to keep White under control on the kingside. Indeed should White be unable to make any progress on that flank, Black's extra queenside space will become a useful asset in the middlegame. The text is probably the most precise move order, although Black has often preferred 7...♘e7 8 ♘f3 ♘f5 and only then 9...h5.

8 ♘f3

Natural. The more ambitious 8 ♗e3?! ♘c6 9 ♗f2 allowed Black to reveal in D.Solak-D.Sadvakasov, Subotica 2000, that ...h5 wasn't just a prophylactic measure: 9...g5! 10 ♘f3 gxf4 (Solak's suggestion of 10...g4!? 11 ♘d2 f6! 12 exf6 ♘xf6 is perhaps even better with an excellent version of the French for Black) 11 gxf4 ♘h6 12 ♕d2 ♖g8 13 ♖g1 ♗e7

gave Black a good game with opportunities on both flanks, while his king was safe enough in the centre.

8...♘h6 9 0-0 ♘c6 10 ♕e2 ♘f5

11 ♘d1?!

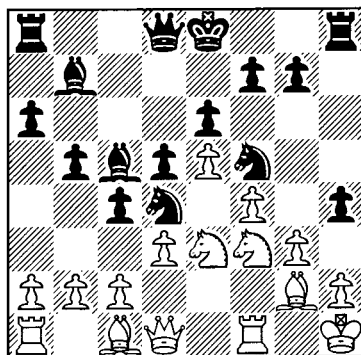
This doesn't especially convince, although White really needs to redeploy his knight from c3 if he is to improve his position. In E.Hidegh-N.Lakos, Hungarian League 2006, White preferred to prepare 12 ♘e2 with 11 ♕f2 and now 11...♘cd4!? is one good option, although it's also very much possible to proceed more slowly with Lakos' 11...♖c8 and ...♗e7. After 11...♘cd4, play might continue 12 ♘d1 (if 12 ♘xd4, Black should recapture with 12...cxd4!, gaining good pressure even in the event of 13 ♘e2 and c3 from White) 12...h4 13 g4 h3! 14 ♗h1 ♘xf3+ 15 ♗xf3 ♘d4 16 ♗h1 ♗e7 17 c3 ♘c6 with a complex situation, but also one in which White is looking a little overextended: he has managed to get in g4, but having lost control of the h4-square this is a double-edged gain. Black could now continue positionally with ...♕b6 and ...d4, but I also quite like the aggressive plan of ...♕d7, ...0-0-0 and, unless White has tried a committal f5, ...f6, beginning to lever open the kingside.

11...c4!

Making good use of both Black's extra queenside space and his control of the d4-square to open up the position.

12 ♘e3

Perhaps 12 c3!? was a better try, although this gives Black a hook for a later ...b4 and 12...cxd3 13 ♕xd3 ♗c5+ 14 ♗e3 ♕b6 continues to look like a favourable French-type position for Black.

12...♗c5 13 ♔h1 ♘cd4 14 ♕d1 h4!

We've been following D.Recuero Guerra-J.De la Villa Garcia, Linares 2005, in which the threats of ...h3 and ...hxg3 ensured that White remained under some pressure.

An early ...a6 and ...b5 remains rather uncharted against the Closed Sicilian, but is a good try to get White players away from their standard setups and plans. Much remains to be explored in these lines, but Black is in quite reasonable shape, especially in the most common line of 6 f4 and then 6...d5.

B)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 a6 3 f4

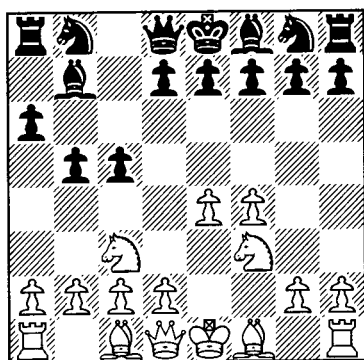
The Grand Prix approach, but it is worth noting that many works on this aggressive scheme recommend that White should now take play into a Closed Sicilian set-up, since White is no longer able to develop his light-squared bishop aggressively on c4 or b5.

3...b5

Again this is the consistent follow-up, albeit one that strangely goes unmentioned in the recent white repertoire book *Chess Openings for White, Explained.*

4 ♘f3

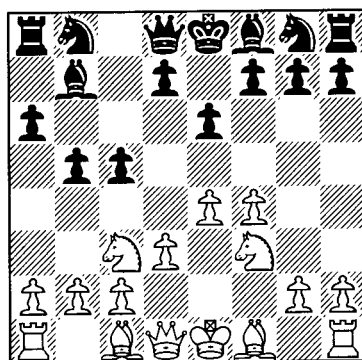
Should White be happy with a transposition to the Closed, not that he has anything better, he might prefer the move order 4 g3 ♗b7 5 ♗g2 e6 6 d3 and we've reached the main line of our last section.

4...♗b7

5 d3

Best. White's less natural alternatives aren't so convincing:

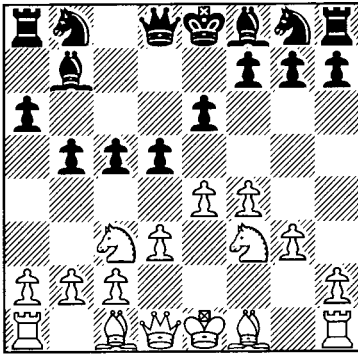
a) 5 ♕e2 has been used by Aronian in a rapid game, but is rather asking for 5...♘c6 and a quick attack on the white queen. Following 6 d3 (6 g3?! ♘d4! 7 ♘xd4 cxd4 8 ♘d1 ♖c8 9 d3 e6 10 ♗g2 ♗b4+ 11 c3 dxc3 12 bxc3 ♖xc3! cost White a pawn in D.Huerta-N.Delgado, Santa Clara 2003) 6...♘d4 7 ♘xd4 cxd4 8 ♘d1 ♖c8 9 ♕f2 d5!? 10 ♕xd4 dxe4 11 ♕xd8+ ♖xd8 Black had comfortably equalized in N.Gamboa-A.Zapata, Medellin 2002.

b) 5 d4?! cxd4 6 ♘xd4 has only been tried once, namely in N.Mitkov-A.Korobov, Chalkidiki 2002. There Black opted to take play into an unusual line of the Kan with 6...e6 7 ♗d3 ♗c5, but it was also possible to grab the pawn with 6...b4 when White's compensation looks rather insufficient after the likes of 7 ♘d5 e6 8 ♘e3 ♗xe4 and 7 ♘a4 ♗xe4 8 ♘c5 ♗d5 9 a3 bxa3 10 c4!? ♕a5+! 11 ♕d2 ♕xc5 12 cxd5 ♘f6.

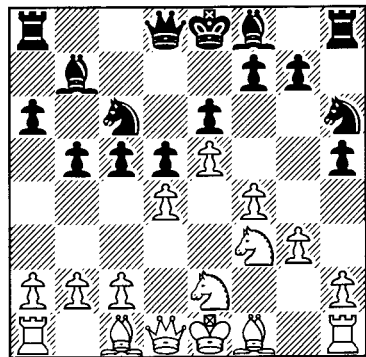
5...e6

6 g3

Taking play into Closed Sicilian lines. White's best independent approach might be 6 g4!?, a favourite idea in the Grand Prix of the young Arme-

nian, Tigran L. Petrosian. His recent game with Gordon (European Championship, Dresden 2007) continued 6...d5 7 ♗g2 (7 ♕e2 dxe4 8 ♘xe4 ♘f6 9 g5 ♘xe4 10 dxe4 ♘c6 11 c3 h6! 12 gxh6 gxh6 was also rather unclear in K.Bulski-P.Jaracz, Warsaw (rapid) 2005) 7...b4 8 ♘e2 ♘f6 (an immediate 8...dxe4!? is also quite possible; Black is fine after both 9 ♘g5 ♘f6 10 ♘g3 ♘c6 11 ♘5xe4 ♘d5 and 9 ♘e5 ♘d7 10 ♘g3 ♘gf6) 9 ♘e5 ♘bd7 10 ♘xd7 ♘xd7 11 ♘g3 dxe4 12 0-0 ♕b6 13 dxe4!? c4+! 14 ♔h1 ♗c5 15 ♕e2 0-0 and was quite unbalanced, although Black's queenside play was at least the equal of White's kingside prospects.

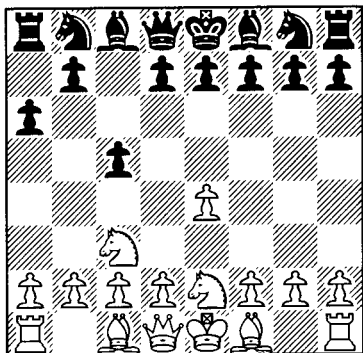
6...d5

The position is clearly very similar to the main line of Line A. Indeed a transposition is very likely; for example, 7 e5 h5 8 ♗g2 is the main line there, while an immediate 7 ♗g2 transposes to note 'b' to White's 7th move. There are also two semi-independent options:

a) 7 exd5 b4 (creating the option of a piece recapture on d5, but 7...exd5 8 d4 ♘f6 isn't actually at all bad for Black due to the hole on e4; for example, 9 ♗g2 ♗e7 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♔h1 ♘e4! gave Black good counterplay in I.Starostits-Z.Ksieski, Leutersdorf 2002) 8 ♘b1 (White preferred the startling 8 dxe6? in D.Wang-B.Thorvardson, Kapuskasing 2004, but I'm not convinced by his compensation after 8...bxc3 9 exf7+ ♔xf7 10 ♗g2 ♗xf3! 11 ♕xf3 ♖a7) 8...exd5 (8...♗xd5!? 9 ♗g2 ♘f6 10 0-0 ♘bd7 is a reasonable alternative) 9 ♗g2 ♘f6 10 0-0 ♗e7 was fine for Black in T.Gruskovnjak-J.Gombac, Celje 2004.

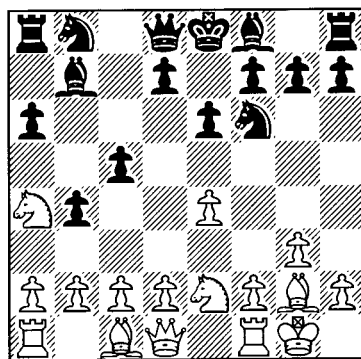
b) 7 e5 h5 (I also quite like Black's independent approach in C.Kaulfuss-N.Coursaget, Plancoet 2003: 7...b4!? 8 ♘e2 d4! 9 ♗g2 ♘e7 followed by ...♘d5) 8 d4?! (another way to avoid a transposition to Line A is 8 ♗h3 ♘h6 9 0-0 when 9...g6 followed by ...♘f5 would have been prudent in T.Verkasalo-S.Nyysti, Raahe 1999) 8...♘h6 9 ♘e2 ♘c6

10 ♗e3 ♕b6 gives Black an improved version of a line of the French (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 e5 ♘fd7 5 f4 c5 6 ♘f3 ♘c6 7 ♗e3 a6 8 ♕d2 b5),

with N.Ondersteijn-K.Landa, Dutch League 2006, continuing 11 a3 ♘f5 12 ♗g1 b4 13 ♗h3?! ♘fxd4 14 ♘fxd4 cxd4 15 ♘xd4 bxa3 16 bxa3 ♗xa3! and Black had netted a pawn.

C)

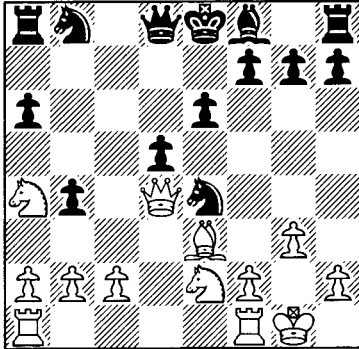
1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 a6 3 ♘ge2

3...♘f6

As played by Ivanchuk and this is probably the best move order for the Najdorf devotee to employ. Black might also begin with 3...d6, but then 4 g3 b5 5 ♗g2 ♗b7 6 d4 is a little awkward since 6...b4?! fails to convince in this particular instance: 7 ♘a4 ♘d7 8 c3! ♘gf6 9 cxb4 cxb4 10 d5 g6 11 ♘d4 ♗g7 and now the energetic 12 ♘c6! gave White the upper hand in S.Rublevsky-A.Areshchenko, European Championship, Warsaw 2005.

A good alternative, and one which will appeal especially to the Kan player, is 3...e6. Then 4 g3 b5 5 ♗g2 ♗b7 6 d3 ♘f6 transposes to note 'b' to White's 6th move in Line A. White can prefer 6 0-0!? when, depending on his Kan repertoire, Black has a choice between development with 6...d6 or 6...♛c7 and taking up the challenge with 6...b4!? 7 ♘a4 ♘f6. After that last option we have:

a) 8 d3 takes play back into the realm of the Closed Sicilian. Black has played ...b4 a little earlier than he did there, but 8...d6 is still quite playable. More independent and quite testing is 8...♗c6!?, after which 9 b3 (or 9 c4 when there's nothing wrong with the solid 9...d6 and if 10 a3, 10...a5; Black might also play more critically and, for example, 9...♛a5!? 10 b3 ♗xa4 11 bxa4 ♘c6 12 e5 ♘g4 13 ♗b2!? ♛c7 14 ♖e1 ♘gxe5 15 ♘f4 quickly reaches an obscure but interesting position in which White has some play for his pawn) 9...♗e7 10 ♘b2 d5 was fine for Black in Y.Mamonova-E.Dolukhanova, Vladimir 2005.

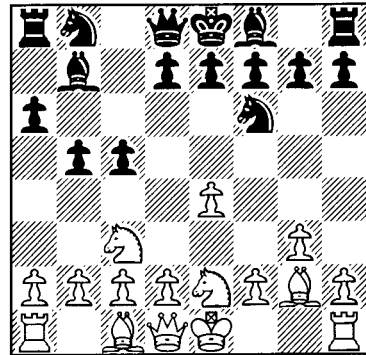
b) 8 e5 ♗xg2 9 ♔xg2 (O.Chaika-R.Kozel, Polanica Zdroj 1996) should be met by 9...♘g4 which can be compared with the note to White's 7th move in our main line, below. In both cases Black has good counterplay, especially here since 10 d4 cxd4 11 ♛xd4 h5 12 ♘b6? is

impossible due to 12...♘c6 and the b6-knight can't remain defended.

c) 8 d4!? is somewhat more critical: 8...♗xe4 9 ♗xe4 (probably best since 9 f3 ♗c6 10 ♘xc5 ♗e7 11 ♘f4 0-0 12 ♘fd3 a5 13 a3 d6 14 ♘e4 ♕b6 gave Black good play in A.Galliamova-L.Portisch, Amsterdam 2001, and 9 dxc5 ♗xg2 10 ♔xg2 ♕c8 11 ♘b6 ♕c6+ 12 ♔g1 ♖a7 13 ♘d4 ♕xc5 14 ♗e3 ♕c7 didn't give White enough for his pawn in M.Thesing-A.Kuligowski, German League 1987) 9...♘xe4 10 ♗e3 cxd4! (10...♗e7 11 ♘xc5 ♘xc5?! 12 dxc5 0-0 13 a3! gave White an edge in C.Oblitas Guerrero-R.Leitao, Sao Paulo 2000) 11 ♕xd4 d5 gives White a useful lead in development, but he seems to have no more than sufficient play for his pawn.

In this interesting and completely unexplored position, play might continue 12 c4!? bxc3 13 ♘b6 ♘d2! 14 ♕xc3 (14 ♗xd2 ♘c6 15 ♕xc3 ♕xb6 regains the piece) 14...♘xf1 15 ♖xf1 ♘d7! (15...♖a7 16 ♘xd5 ♖b7 17 ♗g5! is a little awkward) 16 ♘xa8 ♕xa8 17 ♘d4 ♗d6 when White's pressure is sufficient to regain his pawn and after 18 ♖c1 0-0 19 ♕c6 ♕xc6 20 ♖xc6 ♗c5 21 ♘xe6 fxe6 22 ♗xc5 ♘xc5 23 ♖xc5 ♔f7 a level rook endgame has been reached.

4 g3

Trying to remain in independent waters, rather than transpose to the Najdorf with 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 d6. Another point behind Black's move order is that 4 e5 isn't really anything to be worried about. It actually remains untested, quite possibly because White's king's knight is a little misplaced on e2 and after 4...♘g4 5 f4 it is not so easy for him to complete his kingside development. Play might continue 5...d5 6 ♘g3 (6 h3 only really helps Black since his knight will find a good home on f5, such as after 6...♘h6 7 d4 ♘c6 8 g3 e6) 6...♘c6 7 ♗e2 ♘h6 8 0-0 ♘f5 with rather unimpressive development from White and a fully equal and comfortable game for Black.

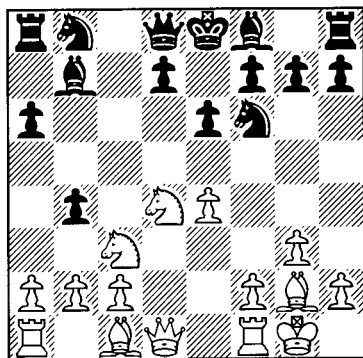
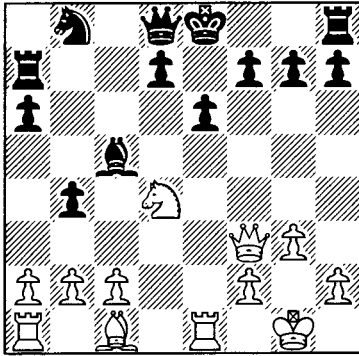
4...b5 5 ♗g2 ♗b7

6 0-0

Now play is likely to transpose to a Closed Sicilian. A much more critical alternative is 6 d4 cxd4 7 ♘xd4 e6, reaching a position which also arises

from the Kan (namely 1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 a6 5 ♘c3 b5 6 g3 ♗b7 7 ♗g2 ♘f6). Assuming that most Najdorf players aren't also Kan experts, here's a round-up of the theory on this sharp and complex position:

a) 8 a3 is rather slow and, for example, 8...d6 (depending on personal preference, Black can also opt for a set-up with 8...♕c7 9 0-0 ♘c6 – Emms) 9 0-0 ♘bd7 10 ♖e1 ♕c7 11 a4 b4 12 ♘a2 ♘c5 13 ♘xb4 ♘cxe4 14 ♘d3 ♗e7 was unbalanced but roughly equal in H.Simonian-A.Zubarev, Kharkiv 2007.

b) 8 ♕e2 b4! 9 ♘a4 (9 ♘d5? fails to 9...exd5 10 exd5+ ♕e7) 9...e5!? (rare, but promising, although a good alternative is the more common 9...♕a5 10 b3 ♘c6) 10 ♘b3 (or 10 ♘f5!? g6 11 ♘e3 ♗c6 12 b3 ♗xa4 13 bxa4 ♗c5 which is unclear, but I quite like Black who will follow up with ...♘c6 and ...♕a5) 10...♗c6 11 ♘ac5 ♗b5! 12 ♘d3 ♘c6 13 0-0 ♗e7 14 a4 bxa3 15 bxa3 a5 gave Black a good game in M.Schlawin-F.Levin, Recklinghausen 2002.

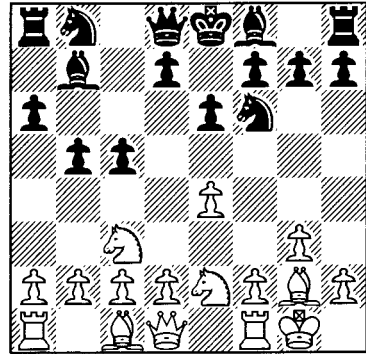
c) 8 0-0!? b4!? (continuing the critical trend)

9 ♘a4! (the critical try, whereas 9 ♘d5? fails to convince and has scored rather badly in practice after 9...exd5 10 exd5 ♗c5! 11 ♖e1+ ♔f8 12 ♘f5 d6 13 ♗f4 ♗c8!? 14 ♘d4 when 14...♕b6 is but one of several good moves; A.Shabalov-I.Smirin, New York 1998, continued 15 ♘c6!? and now Smirin believes that 15...♗b7!? 16 ♕f3 ♘bd7 was simpler and even more promising than the game's 15...h6) 9...♗xe4! (avoiding creating an awkward pin and, furthermore, after 9...♘xe4?! 10 ♖e1 d5, Kupreichik's 11 ♘xe6! fxe6 12 ♕h5+ is rather strong) 10 ♗xe4 ♘xe4 11 ♖e1 ♘c5!? (a recent idea, sensibly exchanging pieces and eliminating any problems to do with the b6-square; Black should avoid the older recommendation of 11...d5?! not because of 12 ♘xe6 when 12...fxe6 13 ♕h5+ g6! 14 ♕e5 ♕f6 is fine, but rather 12 c4! bxc3 13 ♘xc3 ♘xc3 14 ♕h5! when White has a dangerous initiative, as shown by A.Guthrie-J.Humphrey, Mount Buller 2004, and subsequent games) 12 ♘xc5 ♗xc5 13 ♕f3 (White should make use of this disruptive move; instead 13 ♗e3?! ♕b6 14 a3 ♘c6 15 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 16 ♗xc5 ♕xc5 17 axb4 ♕xb4 18 b3 ♕c5 19 ♖a2 left his compensation not looking wholly adequate in E.Safarli-Y.Yakovich, European Championship, Dresden 2007) 13...♖a7 (Black must avoid 13...d5? due to the crushing 14 ♘xe6 fxe6 15 ♖xe6+, but I wonder about 13...♗xd4!? 14 ♕xa8 0-0 15 ♕f3 ♘c6 with a pawn and some play for the exchange) and now:

c1) In this rather fertile position, White has tried to prove compensation with 14 ♘b3!? when 14...♗b6!? 15 a3 ♘c6 16 axb4 ♘xb4 is critical and still not easy to assess, although I don't feel that Black is at all worse.

c2) 14 ♘f5 was preferred in D.Isonzo-T.Likavsky, Imperia 2003, when 14...♕f6 15 ♗e3 ♖c7 16 ♕f4! ♗xe3! would have been rather unclear had White now taken the exchange with 17 ♕xc7 ♗xf2+ 18 ♔xf2 ♕xf5+ 19 ♔g1 0-0, rather than erred with 17 ♘xg7+? ♔e7, but I'm not sure what was wrong with 14...0-0, especially since 15 ♗e3 ♗xe3 16 ♕xe3 ♖c7 17 ♘d6 ♖xc2 surely doesn't give White enough for two pawns, strong though the d6-knight might be.

c3) 14 ♗e3 ♕b6! (superior to the 14...♖c7 15 ♕h5 ♕f6 16 ♘xe6! dxe6 17 ♗xc5 g6?! of E.Sutovsky-G.Livshits, Rishon Le Zion 2006, when 18 ♕d5 would have been strong) 15 ♕g4 0-0 16 ♖ad1 d6 leaves White starting to struggle for compensation, a fact which was highlighted by the further 17 h4 ♔h8 18 h5 h6! of T.Khakimov-K.Bryzgalin, Voronezh 2004.

Najdorf players who wish to employ 2...a6 should be aware that this gambit is probably the critical test of our move order. Currently 11...♘c5 is holding up well, but do expect developments especially concerning 14 ♘b3.

Returning to 6 0-0:

6...e6

Wisely developing the kingside, whereas now is not the moment for 6...b4?!, an advance which must be well-timed. Here 7 ♘d5! favours White, especially since 7...e6 8 ♘xf6+ ♕xf6?? is impossible on account of 9 e5 and the b7-bishop drops.

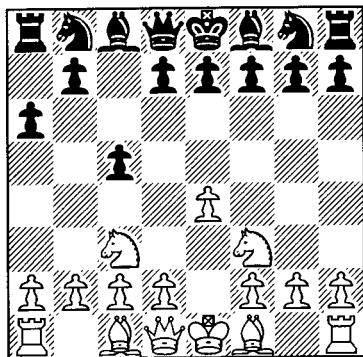
7 d3

The most common choice, albeit in a fairly rare position. Instead 7 d4 b4 8 ♘a4 ♗xe4 transposes to a position which we considered in note 'c' to Black's 3rd move, above. Once again 7 e5 is probably a little too committal and 7...♗xg2 8 ♔xg2 ♘g4 9 d4 cxd4 10 ♕xd4 h5! 11 f4 ♘c6 12 ♕e4 ♘h6 left White in danger of finding himself rather overextended, while Black had good counterplay in S.Del Rio Angelis-S.Cacho Reigadas, Cala Galdana 1994.

7...d6

Play has transposed to note 'b2' to White's 6th move in Line A.

D)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 a6 3 ♘f3

3...d6

The Najdorf move order. Kan players will, of course, prefer 3...e6 when White's only real alternative to 4 d4 is 4 g3. Then 4...b5 5 ♗g2 ♗b7 6 d3 d6 transposes to our main line, while 6 d4 cxd4 7 ♘xd4 ♘f6 transposes to a critical position which we considered in the notes to White's 6th move in Line C.

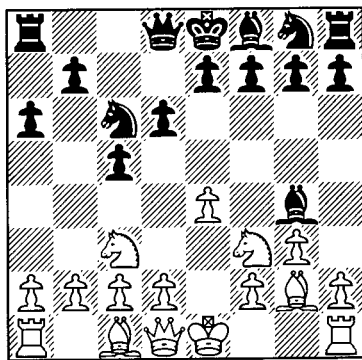
Another option for Black is 3...b5 and if 4 d4, then 4...e6!? is an intriguing, offbeat line which was covered by John Emms in *Dangerous Weapons: The Sicilian* (see the chapter 'The O'Kelly Variation - Not Just a One-trick Pony').

4 g3

This is White's only real alternative to 4 d4, a move which is White's main choice (occurring almost 60% from over 1150 games on ChessBase's *Big Database 2007*) in this position which can, of course, also arise from the move order 2 ♘f3 d6 3 ♘c3 a6. White might also play 4 a4, but then the best he can really do is transpose to the 6 a4 variation of the Najdorf with 4...♘f6 5 d4 cxd4 6 ♘xd4.

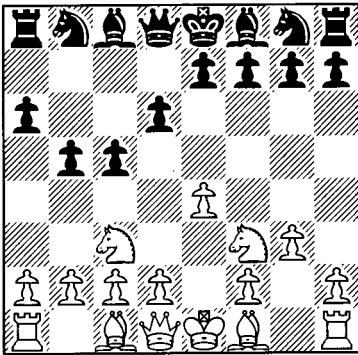
4...b5!?

Black's choice here really depends on how he meets the fianchetto variation of the Najdorf. The text is an independent approach, but is also quite risky. Should Black be happy to meet 6 g3 in the Najdorf with 6...e6 he might prefer 4...♘c6 when 5 d4 cxd4 (5...♗g4!? 6 d5 ♘d4 7 ♗g2 g6 also deserves consideration, V.Savicevic-P.Ljangov, Nis 1997) 6 ♘xd4 e6 7 ♗g2 ♗d7 8 0-0 ♘f6 is a transposition to that variation.

Another good reason for preferring 4...♘c6 is that here 5 ♗g2 can be well met by the Fischer-endorsed 5...♗g4! which is a fairly easy equalizer.

M.Adams-I.Morovic Fernandez, 3rd matchgame, Santiago 1997, for example, continued 6 h3 ♗xf3 7 ♗xf3 g6 8 d3 ♗g7 9 ♗g2 e6 10 0-0 ♘ge7 11 ♗e3 b5 12 a3 ♖b8 13 f4 f5 which led to a balanced type of Closed Sicilian in which Black

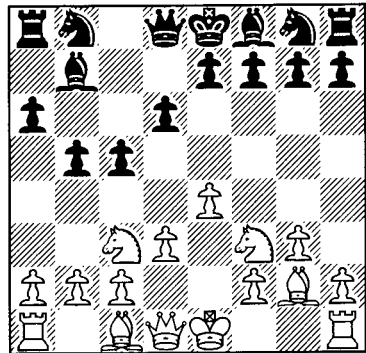
wasn't missing his light-squared bishop. Note too that Black must play 7...e6 before ...g6 after 7 ♕xf3 here, since 7...g6?! 8 e5! dxe5?! 9 ♕xc6+! bxc6 10 ♗xc6+ ♕d7 11 ♗xd7+ ♔xd7 12 ♘a4 gave White a significant structural advantage in P.Biyiasas-J.Timman, Wijk aan Zee 1980.

Another option for black players not entirely happy about allowing ♘f5 in response to ...e5 in the note to White's 5th, below, is 4...e5!?, ruling out d4 once and for all by erecting a Botvinnik set-up, after which Black will continue with ...g6, ...♗g7, ...♘ge7, ...♘c6 and ...0-0 in some order.

Returning to 4...b5:

5 ♗g2

This usually implies that White is settling for a solid type of Closed Sicilian set-up. More critical is 5 d4 cxd4 6 ♘xd4 when it's not so easy for Black to reach the 6 g3 e5 variation of the Najdorf. Perhaps the best try is 6...♗b7 (6...e6 7 ♗g2 ♗b7 is also possible, transposing to a line of the Kan) 7 ♗g2 e5 (or 7...♘f6 when 8 0-0 e5 9 ♘f5!? b4 10 ♘d5 ♘xd5 11 exd5 g6 12 ♘e3 ♗g7 13 a3 bxa3 14 ♖xa3 0-0 15 ♘c4 was unbalanced but also a little better for White in T.Kosintseva-M.Makarov, Moscow 2004) and now 8 ♘b3 ♘f6 9 0-0 ♘bd7 was the desired transposition in G.Jones-A.Adly, Heraklio 2004, but 8 ♘f5!? must be more critical. Then Black must probably give up control of d5, at least for the time being, with 8...g6 9 ♘e3 ♘f6 10 ♘ed5 ♘bd7, intending ...♗g7 and ...♘b6, when 11 a4 is probably a little better for White.

5...♗b7 6 d3

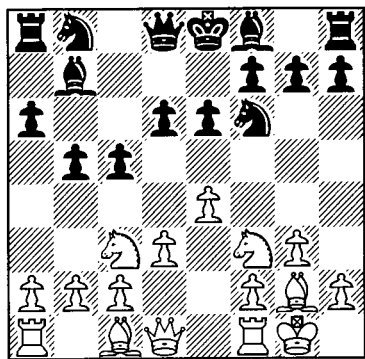
White can again opt for 6 d4 when 6...cxd4 7 ♘xd4 transposes to our last note.

6...e6

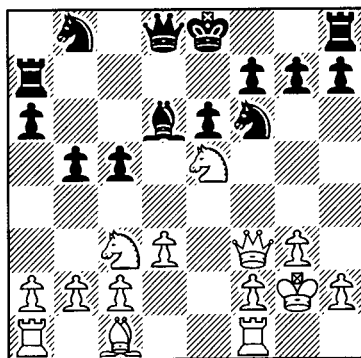
This position, which can also arise via the 3 g3 move order of Line A, is pretty rare at club level, but is seen a little more often at grandmaster level where Morozevich, Short and Timman have dabbled in it. With his f-pawn currently unable to advance, White's position might not look too impressive, but he will usually play to free that pawn after which Black needs to find counterplay against the imminent kingside advance.

7 0-0

White can also opt to immediately free his f-pawn with 7 ♘g5, but this allows Black a number of independent options. One which I quite like is 7...h6!? 8 ♘h3 ♘e7 9 0-0 g6 10 d4 ♘d7 11 ♗e3 ♗g7, reaching a pretty reasonable type of Hippo set-up, after which 12 ♕d2 cxd4 13 ♗xd4 ♘e5 14 f4 ♘c4 began counterplay in J.Benjamin-I.Smirin, Philadelphia 2001.

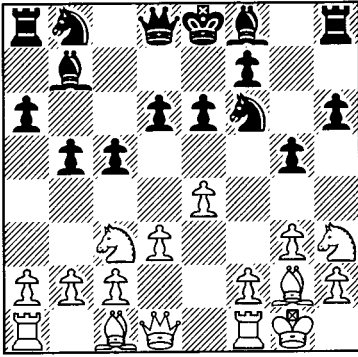
7...♘f6

Completing Black's kingside piece development before deciding what to do with the queen's knight makes a lot of sense. That the white set-up is not without sting was shown after the alternative 7...♘d7 in N.Short-G.Kasparov, Tilburg 1991: 8 a3!? ♖c8 9 ♗d2 ♘gf6?! 10 ♘h4 ♗e7?! 11 e5! ♘d5 and now 12 ♘f5! exf5 13 exd6 ♗xd6 14 ♖e1+ ♘e5 15 ♘xd5 (Short) would have left White somewhat better due to the threat of 16 ♘f6+.

8 ♘g5

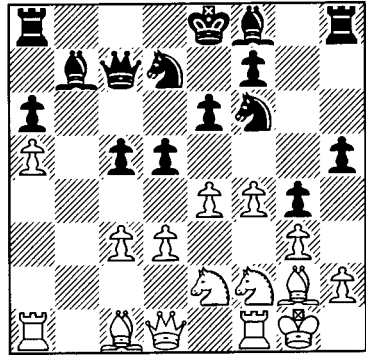
Popular and the most aggressive try, but in view of Black's aggressive response, possibly also not the best. Instead 8 e5 dxe5 9 ♘xe5 ♗xg2 10 ♔xg2 ♗d6!? (a slightly more double-edged choice than the more common 10...♘bd7) 11 ♕f3 ♖a7 also fails to bring White any advantage since Black isn't unduly troubled by the e5-knight.

The game C.Ghysels-S.Siebrecht, Belgian League 2006, continued 12 ♗f4 (or 12 ♖e1 ♕c7 13 ♘g4?! ♘xg4 14 ♕xg4 0-0 15 a4 b4 16 ♘b1 ♘c6 and Black was beginning to take over the initiative in S.Buchal-I.Sokolov, Germany 1998) 12...0-0 13 ♘e4 ♘d5! 14 ♘xd6 ♕xd6 and now 15 ♖fe1 ♘c6 would have been about equal, whereas 15 ♘g6?! ♘xf4+ 16 ♘xf4 ♘c6 17 c3 ♖d7 saw Ghysels, like so many before him, discover that the best way to draw against a higher-rated opponent isn't to blindly hoover pieces at every opportunity.

Perhaps White's best try is 8 ♘h4 ♗e7 9 f4 ♘c6 which at least allows his f-pawn to advance, although Black's extra queenside space should ensure him of a fair share of the chances. After 10 f5 Black can simply defend e6 with Espig's solid 10...0-0 11 fxe6 fxe6 12 ♗h3 ♗c8 or provoke White forwards by closing the

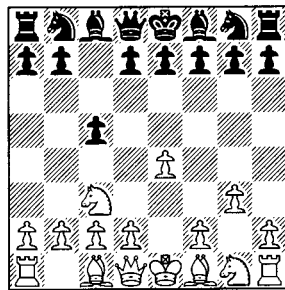
centre: 10...e5!? 11 ♘f3 h6 (prophylaxis against h3 and g4, and Black now intends to arrange the ...d5-break) 12 ♘d5 0-0 13 c3! (13 h3?! is now a little slow and can be met by the sensible 13...♘d4 or even 13...♘xd5!? 14 exd5 ♘b4, intending 15 c4 e4 16 dxe4 bxc4) 13...♖e8 14 h3 ♘b8! 15 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7 16 g4 d5 was indeed rather unbalanced and double-edged in M.Quast-S.Siebrecht, German League 2005.

8...h6 9 ♘h3 g5!

A strong novelty in place of development with 9...♘c6. Black wants to keep the kingside closed and his play is especially directed against White's king's knight: with the activity of that piece restricted, it's not easy for White to find a good plan.

10 f4 g4 11 ♘f2 h5 12 a4 b4 13 ♘e2 ♘bd7

Note how Black avoids 13...h4; he wants to keep the f2-knight imprisoned, rather than allow White some possible counterplay against g4. The text was preferred in D.Schneider-G.Serper, US Championship, Seattle 2002, after which 14 a5 ♕c7 15 c3 bxc3 16 bxc3 d5! saw Black beginning to gain the upper hand.

Serper's ...h6 and ...g5 is an excellent idea against White's slow set-up with ♘g5, but a quick d4 is a more critical test of Black's 4...b5 move order, at least so long as White has some Open Sicilian experience. Don't forget, though, that Black may find a 4...♘c6 move order easier, especially if he is happy to play against the fianchetto Scheveningen.

Chapter Three

The Closed Sicilian

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3

The text when followed by a kingside fianchetto reveals White's intention to play the Closed Sicilian.

The Closed is quite easy to learn, but also contains a number of subtleties as one would expect from a favourite system of Smyslov's. Should Black not contest the centre with a quick ...d5, White may build up for a kingside attack, not that any such aggression should overly worry Black who will usually be rather fast himself on the queenside. Our coverage now divides into:

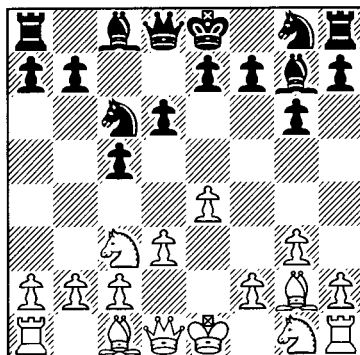
A: 2...♘c6 3 g3
B: 2...e6 3 g3

2...a6 3 g3 has already been covered in Line A of the previous chapter.

A)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6

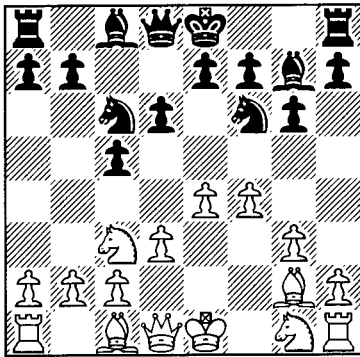
This remains very much Black's main defence to the Closed and now the next few moves are fairly standard as both sides develop in the manner of a reversed English.

4 ♗g2 ♗g7 5 d3 d6

Now there is an important divide:

A1: 6 f4
A2: 6 ♗e3
A3: 6 ♘ge2
A4: 6 ♘h3
A5: 6 ♘f3

Against these, and especially 6 f4, Black often opts for a set-up with ...e6 and ...♘ge7. That is quite harmonious, but is also a set-up which White will have plenty of experience against. Instead in all cases I will be focusing on set-ups with ...♘f6, in keeping with our concept of 'fighting' to sharpen the game. These are quite provocative since White wants to launch a kingside attack in any case, and by persuading White to burn his bridges a double-edged game quickly ensues. By staying calm and alert on the kingside, Black shouldn't be blown away in the manner of many of the youthful Spassky's victims, and a queenside pawn advance will supply quite reasonable and straightforward counterplay.

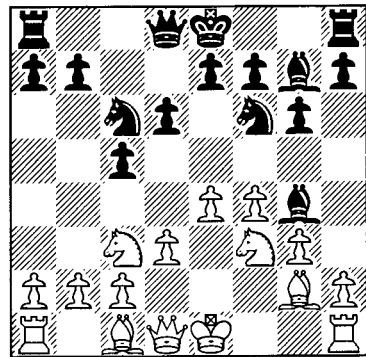
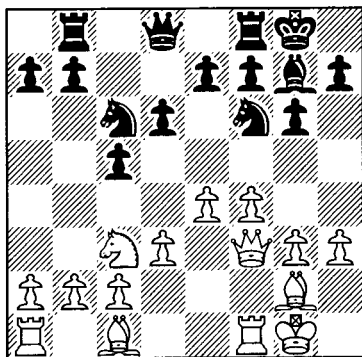
A1)

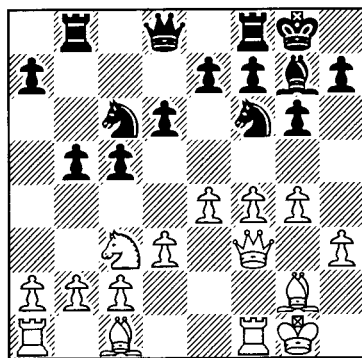
1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7 5 d3 d6 6 f4 ♘f6

For years this move lay under something of a cloud following three defeats for Geller with it in his 1968 Candidates' Match against Spassky. However, as shown by Kasparov in his *My Great Predecessors* series, Geller's provocative opening choice actually gave him quite reasonable positions out of the opening on each occasion.

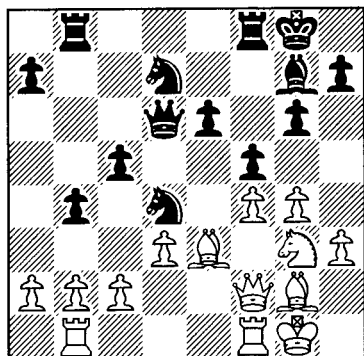
7 ♘f3

By far White's main move. Instead 7 h3 0-0 8 ♘f3 ♖b8 9 0-0 transposes to our main line, but this move order might be a problem for fans of the note to Black's 7th. They may wish to thus investigate 7...e5!? after which 8 ♘ge2 (8 ♘f3 ♘h5! 9 ♘e2 exf4 10 gxf4 0-0 11 0-0 f5 gives Black good play) 8...♘h5 9 0-0 (this fails to impress, but 9 f5!? gxf5! 10 exf5 ♘f6 11 0-0 d5 12 ♗g5 ♘e7 doesn't appear to be too bad at all for Black who can hold d5) 9...exf4 10 g4 ♘g3 11 ♘xg3 fxg3 12 ♕f3 ♗e6 13 ♕xg3 ♘d4 14 ♖f2 h5! gave Black, who could still castle long, good counterplay in K.Soldatenkov-S.Beshukov, St Petersburg 1999.

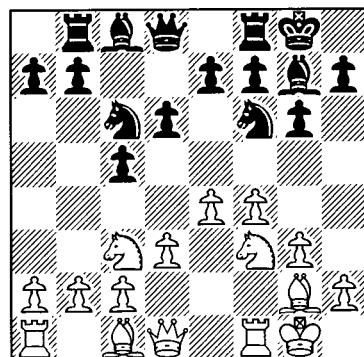
7...0-0

Those who like to avoid forcing lines may wish to borrow an idea from the Austrian Attack with 7...♗g4!?. This has been virtually untouched by theory, but is quite logical: Black frees his position and removes a potential attacker.

Following 8 0-0 (8 h3 ♗xf3 9 ♕xf3 0-0 10 0-0 is a transposition, but White can prefer a typical Closed regrouping with 8 ♘e2!?; this prevents ...♘d4 and prepares c3, but is a little slow and the consistent 8...0-0 9 c3 ♖b8 10 h3 ♗xf3 11 ♗xf3 ♘d7 12 ♗e3 b5 13 0-0 b4 gave Black sufficient counterplay in S.Berg-B.Carlier, Gausdal 1990) 8...0-0 9 h3 ♗xf3 10 ♕xf3 (the choice of Closed gurus, Spassky and Short; Black should meet 10 ♗xf3 in similar vein and 10...♖b8 11 ♗g2 ♘d7 12 ♘d5 b5 13 c3 b4 14 c4!? would have been fine for Black in Y.Visser-J.Jens, Dutch League 2006, had he now opted for 14...e6 15 ♘e3 ♘d4, intending ...f5 and meeting the over-extending 16 f5?! with 16...♗e5!) we reach an important position. Here the aforementioned Spassky and Short games both saw 10...♖c8, but I prefer 10...♖b8!? and:

a) 11 ♗e3 ♘d7 (essential; 11...b5?? 12 e5! would be most embarrassing – Black must always watch out for such an advance in the Closed, especially when White's light-squared bishop is unopposed) 12 f5 (White can also press ahead with 12 g4, but then 12...b5 13 e5? rather missed the point of Black's 11th in D.Novitzkij-I.Lutsko, Minsk 2001, and 13...♘d4 14 ♕f2 dxe5 15 f5 e6 16 fxe6 ♘xe6 17 ♗d5 ♘f4! 18 ♗xf4 exf4 19 ♕xf4 ♗e5 left Black better; here White can improve with 13 a3!? a5 14 ♖ab1 b4 15 axb4 axb4 16 ♘e2, although after 16...♘d4 Black still has quite good counterplay – compare with our 7...0-0 main line, below) 12...b5 13 a3 a5 14 ♕f2 b4 15 axb4 axb4 (note the straightforward nature of Black's play) 16 ♘d1 ♘de5 17 ♕d2 ♘d4 18 ♗g5 c4! was a little better for Black in A.Trisic-K.Kulaots, Hamburg 1999; far from helping White attack, f5 simply gave away the key e5-square and did nothing to help the potentially bad bishop on g2.

b) 11 g4 b5

12 ♕f2 (as White hasn't covered the d4-square or made a prophylactic queen move, 12 e5?! can be answered by 12...♘d4 13 ♕f2 dxe5 14 fxe5 ♘d7) 12...b4 13 ♘e2 (13 ♘d1!? ♘d4 14 ♘e3 might be a better try when 14...a5 15 f5 a4 16 a3 bxa3 17 ♖xa3 ♕d7 is quite unclear) 13...♘d7 14 e5?! ♕c7 15 exd6 ♕xd6 16 ♖b1 e6 17 ♗e3 ♘d4 18 ♘g3 f5!

was a thematic way to blunt White's attacking hopes, after which Black's queenside play was the most important feature of the position in C.Drexel-A.Negele, German League 2002.

c) 11 ♕f2 can easily transpose elsewhere, such as after 11...♘d7 12 ♗e3 b5 13 a3 a5 14 f5 b4 leading back to variation 'a'. White might prefer to aim for a quick e5, but after 13 e5 ♘d4 14 exd6 exd6 15 g4, 15...f5 is the simplest way to halt White's expansion and Black can also consider 15...♖e8!?.

Returning to the main line with 7...0-0:

8 0-0 ♖b8

9 h3

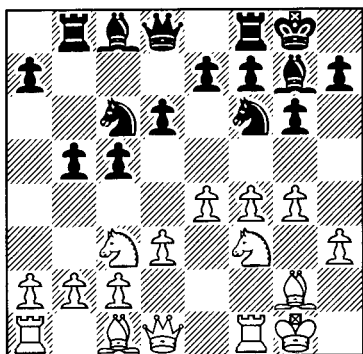
Not only facilitating ♗e3 and ♕d2 by preventing an awkward ...♘g4, but also preparing to roll the kingside pawns. White might prefer to delay Black on the queenside with 9 a4; an advance which is often considered a little suspect, but here 9...a6 10 h3 b5 11 axb5 axb5 12 ♗e3 b4 merely transposes to our main line.

As one of White's main attacking schemes involves f5, ♕e1-h4, ♗h6 and ♘g5 (after which only the f6-knight prevents mate on h7), 9 ♘h4 is a little illogical, but this was Spassky's first try in B.Spassky-E.Geller, 2nd matchgame, Suhumi 1968: 9...♘d4 10 f5 b5 11 ♗g5 b4 12 ♘b1 ♘d7! 13 ♘d2 ♘e5 saw Black's superbly-centralized knights give him a good game and after 14 ♔h1, probably best is Kasparov's suggestion of 14...♗b7!? intending ...d5.

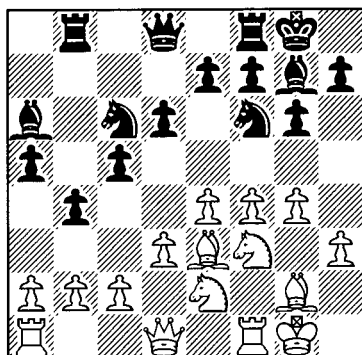
9...b5 10 a3

Spassky's choice against Geller and theory's main recommendation ever since. It may at first appear strange that White should want to open the a-file when he is playing for a direct kingside attack, but White hopes that by allowing only the a-file to open, he can keep the other queenside files closed and that it will take Black too long to gain any meaningful counterplay from his control of the a-file. I must admit that I'm not entirely convinced by White's idea since Black often does gain good counterplay with a rook on a2, as we will see. What is clear, though, is that with Black expanding very quickly on the queenside, White cannot afford to

dally. He might develop a piece first, such as with 10 ♗e3, but after 10...b4 11 ♘e2 a5 he must get on with it with 12 g4, transposing to our next note.

A major alternative to the text, and one which actually occurs just as often in practice, is 10 g4, simply getting on with the attack and ignoring any prophylactic measures on the queenside.

Before seeing how best to counter this, we should briefly examine the instructive encounter N.Davies-I.Ivanov, London 1992: 10...b4 11 ♘e2 ♘e8?! 12 f5 ♘c7 13 ♕e1 ♘b5 14 ♕h4 ♘bd4 15 ♘exd4 ♘xd4 16 ♘xd4 ♗xd4+ 17 ♔h1 ♗b7 18 ♖b1 a5 19 ♗h6 and by simple means White had built up a rather strong attack. Ivanov's knight manoeuvre is by no means uncommon, but is sometimes, as here, rather misguided: not only can it lose time, but from f6 the knight is a key kingside defender. Sometimes the knight may move to d7 after f4-f5, ready to exploit the hole on e5 and unfurling an attack on b2, but in general it is well placed on f6. White may be able to force it to move with g5, but that advance is quite doubled-edged since it costs White the useful attacking device of ♘g5.

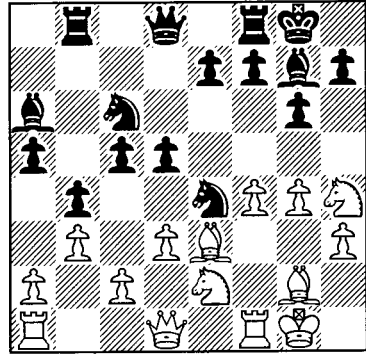
Black should prefer to meet 10 g4 with the consistent 10...b4 11 ♘e2 and now:

a) 11...a5 12 ♗e3 (12 f5?! is even more direct, but Black can gain good counterplay with 12...c4! – f4-f5 also appears a little premature here since it allows Black to provoke White forward in the centre with 12...d5!? when 13 e5 ♘d7 14 e6 fxe6 15 fxe6 ♘de5 16 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 17 ♘f4 ♗b7 is rather unclear, as Van Wely points out, although whether White can gain enough play for his e6-pawn which will drop after ...♕d6, I'm not so sure – 13 ♗e3 cxd3 14 cxd3 ♗a6 as he did in I.Morovic Fernandez-L.Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 1994, and after 15 ♘ed4 ♘xd4 16 ♘xd4 ♖c8 17 ♘f3 ♘d7 18 ♖f2 d5! Black had gained the initiative and was slightly for choice) 12...♗a6 (White can now perhaps meet 12...c4 with 13 dxc4!? since 13...♘xe4? fails to 14 ♘e1 f5 15 ♕d5+ and 16 ♕xc6) and now White has tried a number of approaches:

a1) 13 f5?! c4 14 ♘ed4 ♘xd4 15

♘xd4 cxd3 16 cxd3 ♖c8 transposes back to Morovic Fernandez-Van Wely, above, and 13...a4!? is also very possible after which 14 ♕d2 ♘d7 15 ♖ab1 c4! 16 g5 ♘c5 17 ♘ed4 ♘a5 18 ♘e1 b3 left White's queenside badly creaking in B.Benko-M.Di Marino, correspondence 2004.

a2) 13 ♘g3 c4 14 ♖f2 (enabling White to consider d4 when ...c3 will no longer attack his rook) 14...b3!? (14...cxd3 15 cxd3 ♖c8 was a simpler option) 15 axb3 cxb3 16 cxb3 was seen in M.Klenburg-A.Bykhovsky, Ramat Aviv 2004, when 16...♘b4 17 ♖d2 ♖c8 18 f5 ♘d7 would have left Black with reasonable play for his pawn, since it's not so easy for White to untangle his forces after 19 d4 ♕b6!.

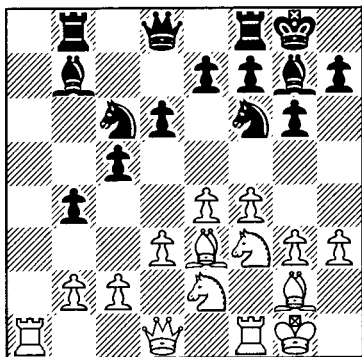
a3) 13 ♘d2!? ♘d7 14 ♖b1 a4 (14...♘b6!? 15 b3 a4 might also be possible, although one can understand Smirnov's reluctance to move his knight so far from the kingside) 15 ♘c4 ♗xc4 16 dxc4 b3! 17 axb3 axb3 18 cxb3 ♘a5 19 ♘c1 ♕b6 was quite unclear in K.Bryzgalin-P.Smirnov, Kazan 2001.

a4) 13 b3 prevents the desired ...c4 and has been met by either 13...♘e8 or 13...♕c7 in practice. Black would, though, prefer to be more direct and as such he might consider 13...a4!?. However, I believe that the best continuation is actually the greedy 13...♘xe4! when 14 ♘h4 (alternatively, 14 ♘e5?! dxe5 15 ♗xe4 exf4 16 ♗xf4 ♖c8 leaves Black a clear pawn ahead and 14 dxe4 ♗xa1 15 ♕xa1 ♗xe2 – the point behind Black's combination – 16 ♖f2 doesn't give White anywhere near enough for the exchange after 16...♗xf3 17 ♗xf3 e5!) 14...d5!

15 dxe4?! (the prudent 15 ♖b1 is the sane choice, but Black remains at least slightly for preference after 15...♘c3 16 ♘xc3 ♗xc3 17 ♗xc5 ♘d4 18 ♘f3 ♘e6!? 19 ♗e3 ♕d6) 15...♗xa1 16 exd5 ♘d4 sees the tactics continuing to work for Black and again White's compensation for the exchange looks inadequate, especially since 17 ♕xa1 ♘xe2+ 18 ♔h2 e5 hits the knight on h4.

b) A reasonable alternative is 11...♘d4!? with the idea of making a timely exchange of knights, as indeed occurred in the move's debut, B.Ibragimov-R.Szuhanek, Canakkale 1994: 12 ♗e3?! ♘xe2+ 13 ♕xe2 ♘d7 14 ♗c1 (14 ♖ab1 ♕a5 is awkward) 14...a5 15 ♖b1 a4 and Black was pretty fast on the queenside. Szuhanek's notes suggest that 12 c3 bxc3 13 bxc3 ♘xf3+ 14 ♗xf3 is a better try when he offers the amazing 14...h5!? (14...c4 looks like a good and simpler alternative, intending 15 d4 d5!) 15 ♘g3 hxg4 16 hxg4 ♘xg4! 17 ♗xg4 ♗xc3 18 ♗xc8 ♕xc8 19 ♗e3 ♕h3 20 ♕f3 ♖b2!? 21 ♗f2 ♗d4 22

♖ae1 ♖xa2 still with some pressure and three good pawns for the piece.

Returning to 10 a3:

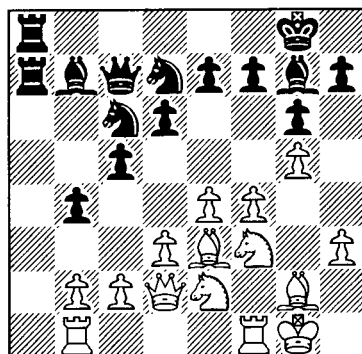
10...a5 11 ♗e3 b4 12 axb4 axb4 13 ♘e2 ♗b7

The bishop is well placed here both to contest the long diagonal and to cover the d5-square. Just as after 10 g4, Black should not be in a hurry to redeploy his king's knight with 13...♘d7; the knight may well be needed on f6 for the defence.

14 b3

This, ruling out any further advance of the black queenside pawns, is White's main move, but in this important tabiya he has also tried:

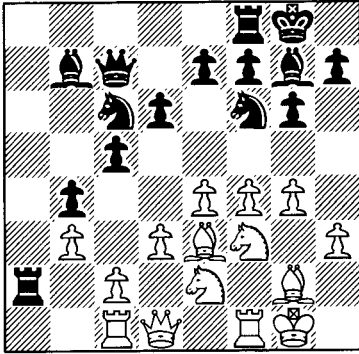
a) 14 ♖c1 ♖a8 15 g4 ♖a2 16 b3 transposes to our main line.

b) Before settling on our main line in his sixth matchgame against Geller, Spassky preferred 14 ♕d2 ♖a8 15 ♖ab1 in the fourth when Black should play as in the main line with 15...♖a2, followed by ...♕c7 and ...♖fa8 (Van der Weide). Here White has also tried 15 ♖xa8!? ♕xa8 16 g4 when 16...♘d7 17 b3 e6 18 f5 exf5 19 gxf5 ♘ce5 was fine for Black in W.Bonatti-J.Copie, correspondence 2001, and he can also consider 16...♕a2!? 17 b3 ♖a8, intending ...♕b2 and ...♖a2/♖a1.

c) 14 g4 ♖a8 15 ♖b1 ♖a2 16 ♘c1 (or 16 b3?! which is clearly very similar to our main line, but the white rook isn't so well-placed on b1 as 16...♕c7 17 f5 ♘d7 18 ♘f4 ♘d4 emphasizes; White does much better to overprotect c2) 16...♖a7 17 ♕d2 ♕c7 18 ♘e2 ♖fa8 19 g5 was J.Hickl-N.Anilkumar, Calcutta 1994, and now Van der Weide points out the natural improvement 19...♘d7 after which I quite like Black;

for example, 20 h4 (after g5 it's not clear what else White can try) 20...♖a2 21 b3 ♗a6!? 22 h5 ♘d4! 23 ♘exd4 cxd4 24 ♘xd4 e5 and again the weakness of c2 gives Black excellent counterplay.

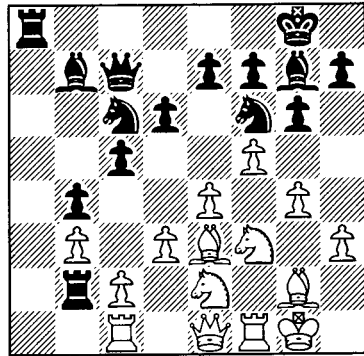
14...♖a8 15 ♖c1 ♖a2 16 g4 ♕c7!

An improvement over the time-consuming 16...♕a8?! of B.Spassky-E.Geller, 6th matchgame, Suhumi 1968, in which 17 ♕e1 ♕a6 18 ♕f2! ♘a7?! 19 f5! saw White gain a strong attack and go on to win in style. Instead the queen is much better placed on c7, from

where she both supports ...♘d4 ideas and may assist the defence along the second rank.

17 ♕e1 ♖fa8!

For the second move in a row we witness an important improvement. 16...♕c7 was actually introduced in the game S.Marjanovic-R.Hernandez, Vrsac 1977, but there Black erred with 17...♘d7?! and was quickly somewhat worse following 18 ♕h4 ♘d4 19 ♘exd4 cxd4 20 ♘xd4! e5 21 ♘f3 with the point that 21...♖xc2?! run into the awkward 22 ♕e7!. Instead the text is a strong novelty of the respected Dutch theoretician and IM, Karel Van der Weide, which he later explained in an excellent survey for *New In Chess*. The idea is to continue with Black's queenside counterplay, while asking White just how he intends to break through on the kingside. Indeed, like Van der Weide, I suspect that White may well be too slow here and that he does better with one of his alternatives at move 10 or 14.

D.Reinderman-K.Van der Weide, Dutch Championship, Rotterdam 1998, continued:

18 f5 ♖b2

19 ♘f4

P.Helbig-R.Palliser, British League 2005, deviated with 19 fxg6 hxg6 20 ♕h4 ♖aa2 and now White went all in, but after 21 ♘g5?! ♖xc2 22 ♖xc2 ♖xc2 23 ♘f4, 23...♘d8! would have kept everything covered and left White struggling, whereas 23...♘e5?? 24 ♘fe6! fxe6 25 ♖xf6! should have given White a winning attack – Black must be somewhat more alert to White's sacrificial breakthroughs than I was here.

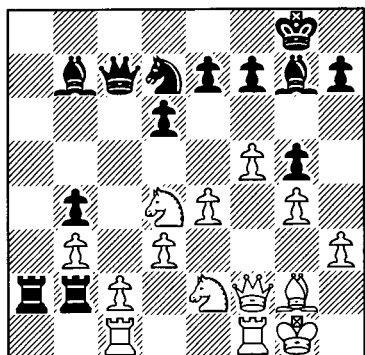
White might also consider 19 ♕f2!? to cover d4, but then 19...♖aa2 20 ♘e1 ♕c8! is a crafty idea of *Rybka*'s, covering e8 and preparing to put one of the black knights on e5.

19...♖aa2 20 ♕f2

20 g5 ♘d7 21 ♘d5 ♕d8 22 ♕f2 ♘ce5! 23 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 sees Black's control and use of the e5-square keep everything together with 24 f6 now failing to 24...♗xd5 25 exd5 ♘xd3 (Van der Weide).

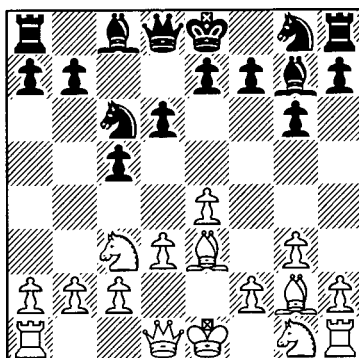
20...♘d4!

Black has excellent counterplay and now 21 ♗xd4 cxd4 22 ♘xd4 g5! 23 ♘fe2

♘d7 gave Black control of the dark squares, strong pressure and more than enough play for the pawn.

However, even the superior 21 ♘xd4!? cxd4 22 ♗xd4 ♖xc2 23 ♖xc2 ♖xc2 24 ♕e3 g5! 25 ♘e2 h6 would have left White a little worse.

This has been quite a theoretical section, but by provoking White forwards with 6...♘f6, Black appears to gain good and quite straightforward counterplay. Indeed I don't believe that too much memorization is needed here, more just a careful study of White's various attacking schemes which we've considered in the notes. That, allied to a calm head, should enable Black to fend off White's attacking tries. Don't forget that the attack too is far from easy to handle in the rather complex middlegames which arise, but White generally must attack; an ending with a vulnerable queenside and bad bishop on g2 is not really what he's looking for.

A2)

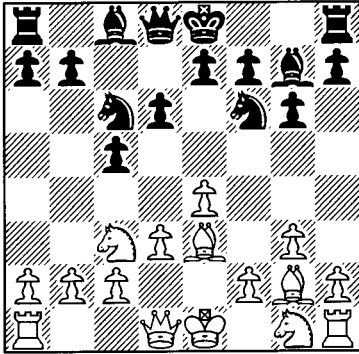
1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7 5 d3 d6 6 ♗e3

This flexible choice became quite popular around the turn of the century, partly due to both Adams and Short enjoying some success with it. It was then recommended in John Emms' successful repertoire work, *Attacking with 1 e4*, and remains to this day a more popular choice than the older 6 f4. By delaying advancing his f-pawn, White intends to first exchange the dark-squared bishops, only then deciding whether to advance on the kingside (with f4 or even h4) or to turn instead to queenside play.

Against this tricky approach we will examine both:

A21: 6...♘f6
A22: 6...♖b8

The former continuation has some similarities with our preferred system against 6 f4, while the latter is a popular attempt to take advantage of White's early bishop development by rapidly attacking b2.

A21)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7 5 d3 d6 6 ♗e3 ♘f6

Just as in Line A1, Black completes his kingside piece development as quickly as possible. This option also disrupts White's intended set-up since 7 ♕d2?! is now well met by 7...♘g4 (and if 8 ♗f4, then 8...e5), removing White's key bishop with a good game for Black (e.g. 8 ♘ge2 ♘xe3 9 fxe3 0-0 10 0-0 ♖b8 11 ♘d1 b5 12 c3 e5 and the white position was also pretty grim in I.Martinez Martin-D.Adla, Pamplona 2003).

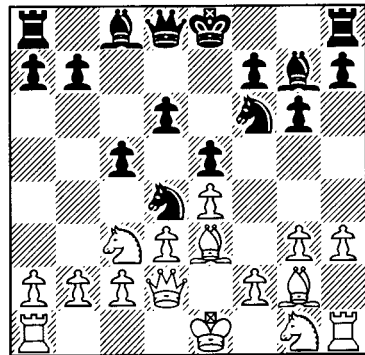
7 h3

By far White's main choice, prudently preparing ♕d2. Note that 7 ♘ge2 is also possible, transposing after 7...0-0 8 0-0 ♖b8 9 h3 to a variation covered in Line A3. As we will see there White might prefer the move order 8 h3, but that gives Black the extra option of 8...e5, transposing to the main line of this section and indeed both the Adams-Kasparov and Adams-Topalov games, below, began with such a move order.

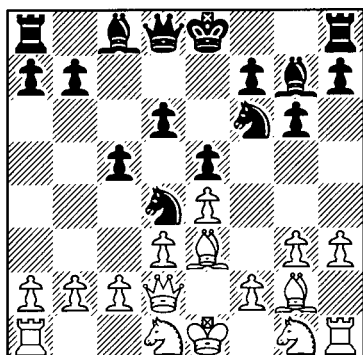
7...e5!?

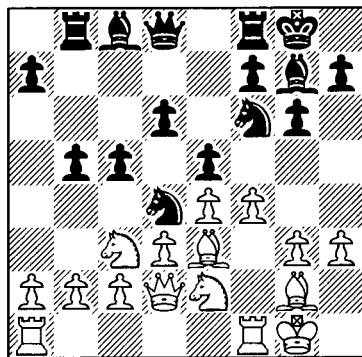
A tricky independent approach, endorsed by no less a player than Kasparov himself. Fans of Black's approach in our last section might have been expecting 7...0-0 to be recommended. This can transpose back to Line A after 8 f4 ♖b8 9 ♘f3 b5 10 a3 (or 10 0-0) 10...a5 11 0-0 b4, but more of a problem is the sneaky move order 8 f4 ♖b8 9 ♕d2 when 9...b5 is ruled out (10 e5!). Black must thus lose a move and although both 9...♗d7 and 9...♘d7 are playable, I feel that Black is likely to land up with an inferior version of the variations covered in Line A.

8 ♘ge2

Another wise choice by White. An unsuspecting opponent might prefer 8 ♕d2, but then 8...♘d4! prevents 9 ♗h6 and contains some other tricky tactical points:

a) 9 f4? ♘h5! 10 ♘ge2 (White can save his pawn with 10 ♗xd4 cxd4 11 ♘ce2 exf4! 12 gxf4, but this is probably the worse evil in view of 12...♕h4+) 10...♘xe2 11 ♘xe2 exf4 12 gxf4 ♗xb2 leaves White pretty much a clear pawn

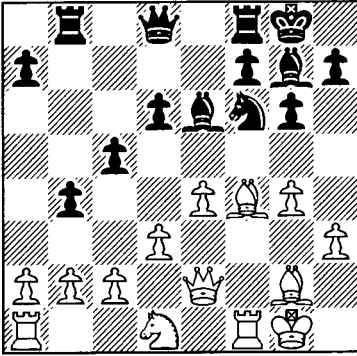
down; for example, 13 ♖d1 ♗g7 14 d4 cxd4 15 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 16 ♕xd4 ♕h4+ 17 ♕f2 ♕xf2+ 18 ♔xf2 ♔e7 left Black facing purely a technical task in B.Bartsch-L.Drabke, Forchheim 2002.

b) 9 ♘d1 hopes to evict the knight with c3, but is a little slow

and 9...d5 10 c3 ♘e6 11 ♗h6 (Black gained an edge after the neat 11 exd5 ♘xd5 12 ♗h6?! ♘df4! in M.Shukurova-F.Velikhanli, Vladimir 2004) 11...0-0 12 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 (12...♘xg7!? 13 exd5 ♘xd5 14 ♘f3 f6 15 0-0 ♗e6 and ...♕d7 might be a better way to untangle) 13 exd5 ♘xd5 14 ♘f3 ♕d6 15 0-0 ♖d8 16 ♘e3 left White the side playing to equalize with exchanges and the d4-break in W.Frank-U.Weber, Hessen 1999.

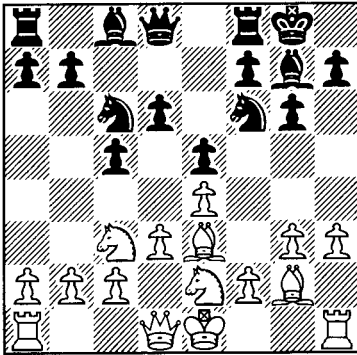
c) 9 ♘ge2 0-0 10 f4 (correct; 10 0-0? ♗xh3!, exploiting the queen's position on d2, is another trick which White has been known to fall for) 10...♖b8 (with White having avoided all the tricks, Black switches back to a thematic queenside advance) 11 0-0 (or 11 g4 exf4! 12 ♘xf4, S.Lomibao-J.Zhang, Kuala Lumpur 2005, and now 12...b5 gives Black plenty of counterplay; note that 13 0-0-0? would now be rather misguided since 13...b4 14 ♘ce2 ♕a5 15 ♔b1 ♘b5! leaves Black's attack somewhat the more advanced) 11...b5 and:

c1) 12 ♘c1?! b4 13 ♘d1 looks a little strange, but this manoeuvre is quite a common way of driving back a d4-knight in the 6 ♗e3 variation. However, in this particular instance Black is well developed and 13...♘h5! 14 c3?! (too ambitious, although 14 ♔h2 exf4 15 gxf4 f5 16 c3 bxc3 17 bxc3 ♘e6 18 ♘e2 ♗a6 also leaves the white position under some pressure) 14...bxc3 15 bxc3 would have left Black much better and with the initiative in D.Robertson-B.Harold, Glasgow 2005, had he now found 15...♘xg3! 16 cxd4 ♘xf1 17 ♔xf1 exf4 18 ♗f2 f5.

c2) 12 fxe5 dxe5 13 ♘d5!? (L.Weiler-H.Escher, Bergen Enkheim 1997) is quite critical, but with 13...♘xd5 14 exd5 ♗b7 15 c4 f5 Black gains good counterplay on both sides of the board.

c3) 12 ♖ae1 b4 13 ♘d1 ♘h5! 14 ♔h2 f5 once again left the white position a little too cramped in A.Wisniewski-V.Faibisovich, Swidnica 2000.

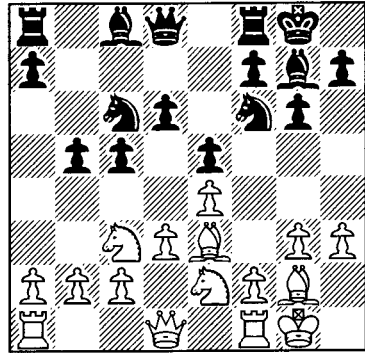
c4) 12 g4 b4 13 ♘d1 ♘xe2+ (the simplest way to equalize; Black doesn't want to allow White a strong attack after an f5-advance) 14 ♕xe2 exf4 15 ♗xf4 ♗e6

16 ♕d2 ♕b6 was fairly comfortable for Black and about equal in F.Paneff-W.Henke, Werther 2005.

Returning to the prudent 8 ♘ge2:

8...0-0

9 0-0

Unlike when Black responds to 6 ♗e3 with the natural but inaccurate 6...e6 7 ♕d2 ♘ge7, here all that White gains by castling queenside is to give Black a strong attack. The text is thus the best way to continue White's sensible play, but he can also opt to transpose to variation 'c' in the note to his 8th move, above, with 9 ♕d2 ♘d4.

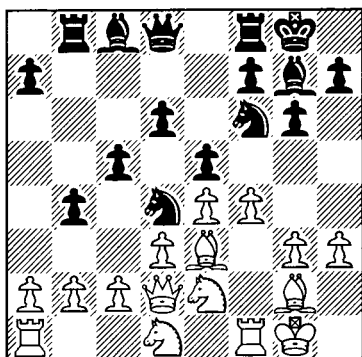
9...b5!

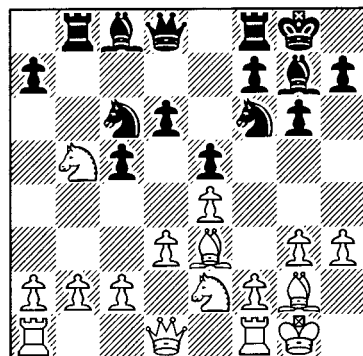
A typically active and complex Kasparovian novelty. Black might prefer to try and transpose back to the notes to White's 8th with 9...♘d4 10 f4 ♖b8. Then 11 ♕d2 is indeed a transposition, but much more problematic is Westerinen's 11 f5!, intending 11...gxf5 12 ♗g5 with awkward pressure and good positional compensation for the pawn. This is actually quite a typical Closed Sicilian device and one usually worth avoiding, at least from a practical point of view.

10 ♘xb5

One of the beauties of Black's set-up is that White must take up the challenge like this as the alternatives are rather unpromising:

a) 10 f4?! b4 11 ♘d5 ♘xd5 12 exd5 ♘d4 (12...♘e7!?, threatening both the b2-pawn and ...♘f5, is also rather promising) 13 fxe5 ♘xe2+ 14 ♕xe2 ♗xe5 was assessed by Adams as

slightly favouring Black; two pawns are en prise and after 15 ♗xc5, Black has a pleasant choice between 15...♗xg3, probably followed by ...♕h4, and 15...♕a5, intending to capture on both b2 and a2.

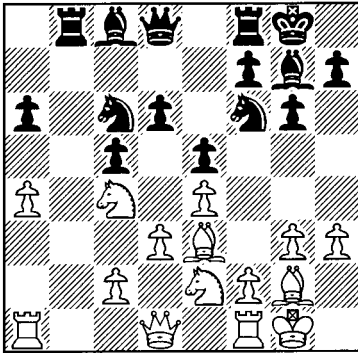
b) 10 ♕d2 b4 11 ♘d1 (even worse was 11 ♘d5?! ♘xd5 12 exd5 ♘d4 13 ♘xd4 cxd4 in F.Mufleh-S.Kojima, Turin Olympiad 2006; Black's potential pressure down the c-file usually gives him the advantage in this structure, especially when, as here, d5 is weak and White lacks counterplay) 11...♖b8!? (moving off the long diagonal in preparation for a future capture of White's f-pawn, but Black might also exploit the tempo gained by not having had to already play ...♖b8 to proceed more sharply with 11...a5 12 f4 a4) 12 f4 ♘d4 (our standard and favourite way of highlighting the downside to White's set-up, especially since White can never really consider an exchange on d4)

13 ♔h2 (this doesn't help matters, but 13 c3?! bxc3 14 bxc3 ♘xe2+ 15 ♕xe2 ♘h5 16 ♔h2 exf4 17 gxf4 ♗a6 18 ♗f3 ♕h4 also left White struggling in Nguyen Huy Cuong-Nguyen Huynh Minh, Vung Tau 2004; probably best is 13 g4 when 13...exf4 14 ♘xf4 ♗b7 15 c3 bxc3 16 bxc3 ♘e6 sees White just about able to still claim equality) 13...♘h5! 14 f5?! (otherwise ...f5 was coming, but this only really makes matters worse as the forthcoming exchanges are in Black's favour) 14...gxf5! 15 exf5 (15 ♗xd4 cxd4 16 exf5 ♗f6 is good for Black too) 15...♘xf5 16 ♖xf5 ♗xf5 17 g4 ♗g6 18 gxh5 ♗xh5 19 ♘g3 ♗g6 and Black's rook and rather useful extra e- and f-pawns outweighed White's two minor pieces in T.Hinks Edwards-J.Shaw, Hastings 2004/05.

10...♖b8

11 ♘ec3!?

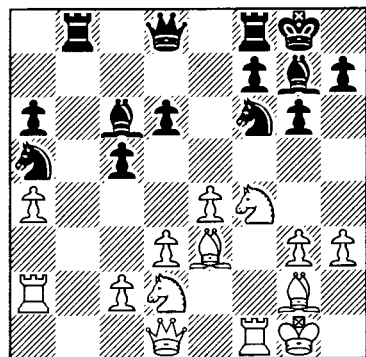
Adams switched to this the second time that he faced 9...b5. White can also defend his knight with:

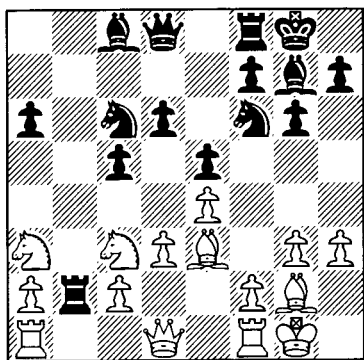
a) 11 c4 takes further control of d5, but actually Black is quite happy in general to provoke ♘d5 in this variation. The resulting positions are quite complex and unbalanced, with Black usually able to arrange a well-timed

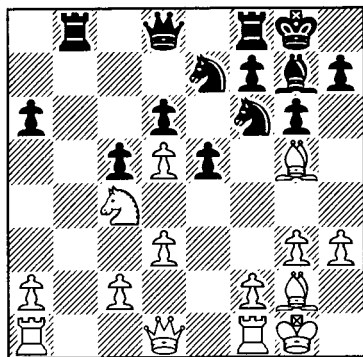
capture on d5 after which White must be careful not to find himself left with a bad light-squared bishop. Here 11...a6 12 ♘bc3 ♖xb2 13 ♕c1 was assessed as equal by Adams, while N.Zainullina-T.Shumiakina, St Petersburg 2002, deviated with 13 ♖b1 ♖xb1 14 ♕xb1 ♗e6 15 ♘d5 and now Black should have contested the queenside with 15...♕a5!?, intending 16...♗xd5 (and not 16...♖b8 due to 17 ♘e7+! and 18 ♘xc6), 17...♖b8 and then either ...♘d4 or ...♘b4.

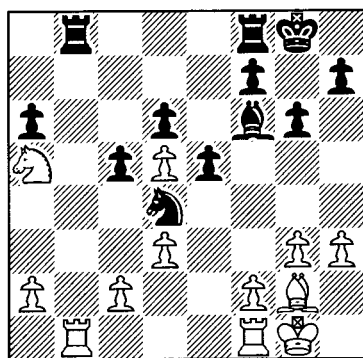
b) 11 a4 a6 12 ♘a3 (White's knights are best placed on c3 and c4; 12 ♘bc3 ♖xb2 followed by ...♘d4 would be rather too easy for Black) 12...♖xb2 13 ♘c4 ♖b8 with a further divide:

b1) 14 ♘c3?! ♗e6 15 ♘d5 ♗xd5 16 exd5 ♘a5! 17 ♘xa5 ♕xa5 18 ♗d2 ♕c7 19 c4! ♘d7 20 ♕c2 ♖b4! 21 a5! (White should decline the exchange; 21 ♗xb4?! cxb4, followed by ...a5, ...♘c5 and ...f5 would give Black all the play) 21...♖fb8 was quite a typical scenario for this variation in R.Palliser-J.Rowson, British Championship, Scarborough 2001. I managed to hold with some active and accurate defence, but there is no doubt that the black position was at least the more comfortable.

b2) 14 ♕d2 ♗e6 15 ♖ab1 ♕c7 16 ♘c3 ♖xb1 17 ♖xb1 ♖b8 saw the exchange of all the rooks end White's hopes of gaining any pressure in M.Aigner-D.Zilberstein, San Francisco 2004, and after 18 ♖xb8+?! ♕xb8 19 ♘d5?! ♗xd5! 20 exd5 ♘b4 d5 dropped off.

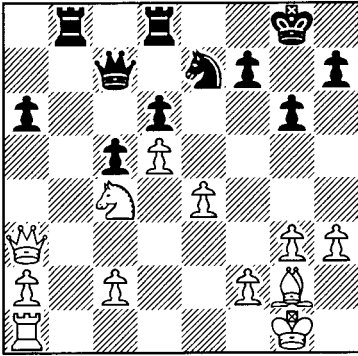
b3) 14 f4 is a better try, importantly giving White some play. The game M.Adams-G.Kasparov, Linares 1999, continued 14...exf4 15 ♘xf4 ♘a5! (Adams' *Chess Informant* notes also mention the line 15...♘e5!? 16 ♘xe5 dxe5 17 ♘d5 ♘xd5 18 exd5 ♕d6 19 ♕d2 ♗d7 with another complex and unbalanced structure) 16 ♘d2! (correctly keeping pieces on, whereas 16 ♘xa5 ♕xa5 17 ♗d2 ♕c7 18 ♗c3 c4! gives Black a slight initiative) 16...♗d7 17 ♖a2 ♗c6 (see diagram), which led to a rather complex manoeuvring struggle.

Returning to the position after 11 ♘ec3:

11...a6 12 ♘a3 ♖xb2

13 ♘c4 ♖b8 14 ♗g5

We've been following M.Adams-V.Topalov, Dos Hermanas 1999, and once again the position isn't at all easy to assess. Now Black should probably follow Adams' suggestion of 14...♗e6!? (14...h6 15 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 16 ♘d5 ♗g7 17 ♖b1 gave White a tiny edge in the game) 15 ♘d5 ♗xd5 16 exd5 ♘e7 which he understandably assesses as unclear. Slightly surprisingly this position remains untested, although I'm sure that will soon change should 6 ♗e3 remain relatively popular.

Let's see how play might continue:

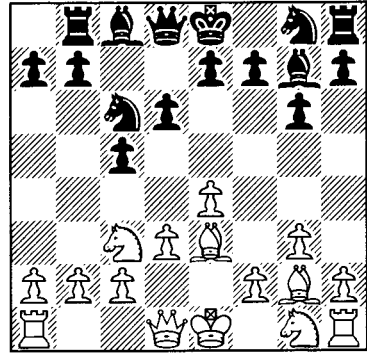
a) 17 ♕d2 ♕c7 (threatening to capture on d5) 18 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 19 ♖ab1 ♘f5! (bringing the knight to d4 gives Black sufficient counterplay in this position, whereas 19...♖xb1? 20 ♖xb1 ♖b8 21 ♖xb8+ ♕xb8 22 ♕a5 leaves a6 and d6 looking rather vulnerable) 20 ♕a5!? (the position is pretty level and it's not easy for White to make progress, especially since 20 c3 would lose control of a5; 20 ♘a5?! would also be misguided in view of 20...♗g5! 21 ♕xg5 ♕xa5, but White could just sit tight) 20...♕xa5 21 ♘xa5 ♘d4

22 ♘c6 (22 c4 ♘e2+ 23 ♔h2 ♘c3 also gives Black enough counterplay) 22...♖xb1 23 ♖xb1 ♘xc2 24 ♖b7 gives White fair play for his pawn, but with 24...♘b4 available Black isn't worse and might also consider the more ambitious 24...♘e1!? 25 ♗f1 ♖e8 followed by opening lines with ...e4.

b) 17 ♕c1!? was an idea of mine in *Starting Out: Closed Sicilian* and has in mind an exchange sacrifice. Unsurprisingly, though, it is quite double-edged and Black does not appear to be worse in the critical position: 17...♕c7 (once again the best square for the

queen; it is useful to stay in touch with the a5- and b6-squares) 18 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 19 ♕a3 e4! 20 dxe4!? (the point; 20 ♖ab1 ♘xd5 is fine for Black after something like 21 dxe4 ♘b4 22 c3 ♘c6 since White's queenside pawns are as weak as Black's) 20...♗xa1 21 ♖xa1 ♖fd8.

In this rather unclear position, Black threatens to gain counterplay with ...♕b7-b4 and after 22 ♕xa6 (alternatively, 22 e5? fails to convince since Black is happy to return the exchange for an extra pawn with 22...dxe5 23 d6 ♖xd6 24 ♘xd6 ♕xd6, but White might consider 22 f4!? when 22...f6 23 ♕c3 ♖f8 24 ♖d1 ♕d7 remains quite unclear, but Black isn't blown away by 25 e5 since 25...fxe5 26 fxe5 ♘f5 and ...♘d4 begins counterplay) 22...♖a8 23 ♕b6 ♕xb6 24 ♘xb6 ♖a3!? (24...♖a6 25 ♘c4 ♖a4 26 ♗f1 f5 27 f3 ♔g7 also leaves White struggling to make progress, but Black is also quite tied down, having to defend the d6-point) 25 ♘c4 ♖c3 26 ♘e3 ♖a3 White should probably repeat since 27 ♗f1?! is met by the advance 27...f5! which thematically undermines his centre.

A22)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7 5 d3 d6 6 ♗e3 ♖b8

The most dynamic option as Black begins immediate queenside counterplay and, yet again, ...b5 needs preparing since 6...b5 7 e5! gives White the initiative. A key feature of our main line is that Black will hold back the development of his king's knight as long as possible: that prevents White's main idea of ♗h6 and the knight may later be best developed to any of e7, f6 and even h6.

7 ♕d2

The consistent follow-up, but occasionally White prefers something different:

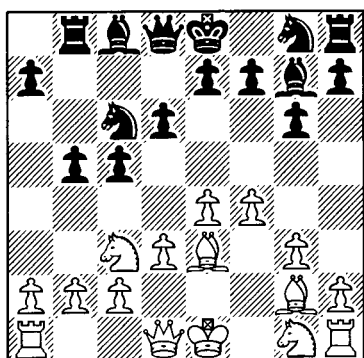
a) 7 a4 doesn't hold Black up on the queenside for long: R.Miller-J.Silman, Philadelphia 1991, for example, thematically continued 7...e6 8 ♕d2 ♘d4 9 f4 (or 9 ♘f3 ♘e7 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♗h6 e5!? 12 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 13 ♘xd4 cxd4 14 ♘e2 ♗e6 15 f4 f6 with rough equality in V.Hort-R.Fischer, Zagreb 1970) 9...♘e7 10 ♘ge2 0-0 11 0-0 a6 12 g4?! f5! (wisely preventing White from attacking with

f5 himself) 13 h3 b5 14 axb5 axb5 15 ♖ab1 b4 16 ♘d1 ♕c7 17 ♘g3 ♗d7 18 ♔h1 ♗a4! 19 b3 ♗c6 when White was under pressure and Black better.

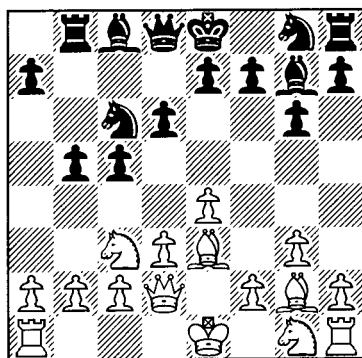
b) 7 ♘ge2 b5 (the most accurate move order; instead 7...♘d4 hopes for 8 ♕d2?! ♗g4, but allows the dangerous exchange sacrifice 8 0-0 b5 9 b4!?) 8 ♕d2 (8 d4 is an advance which Black often prevents, but here 8...b4 supplies plenty of counterplay after 9 ♘a4 cxd4 10 ♘xd4 ♗d7 when White's queen's knight continues to cause him difficulties; it needs to be able to have d1 or e2 available as retreat squares for d3-d4 to be an issue) 8...b4 returns play to our main line.

c) 7 f4 gives Black a choice:

c1) 7...♘f6 is the sensible choice when play is likely to transpose to either Line A1 or Line A3; for example, 8 h3 0-0 9 ♘f3 b5 10 0-0 and we've reached the notes to White's 10th move in A1.

c2) 7...b5 is more provocative:

8 e5!? (taking up the challenge, whereas the misguided 8 ♖b1?! fails to convince and 8...b4 9 ♘ce2 ♕a5! 10 b3 ♕xa2 11 e5 ♕a6 12 d4 ♘h6! left White without any real compensation in I.Bilbija-R.Roskar, Ljubljana 2004) 8...♘d4!? 9 ♘e4 (ambitious, but probably best; instead 9 exd6?! ♘f6! 10 h3 0-0 11 ♘ge2 b4 12 dxe7 ♕xe7 13 ♘e4 ♘d5 gave Black more than enough for his pawn in M.Lopez-F.Rayner, Hastings 1999/2000) 9...♘h6! 10 c3 ♘e6 11 ♘f3 0-0 12 0-0 b4, while not too clear, was a little better for Black in V.Ciampi-M.Bezold, Ischia 1994; not only is White under pressure on the queenside, but Black's current control of g4 and f5 is very useful.

Returning to the consistent 7 ♕d2:

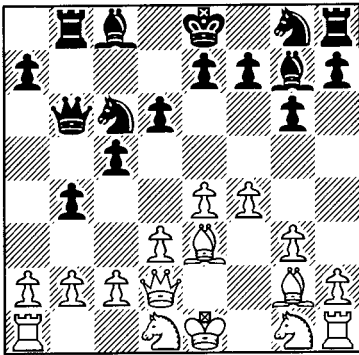
7...b5

8 ♘ge2

This has become established as the main line and indeed the older alternatives are now rarely seen:

a) 8 0-0-0? (talk about castling into it!) 8...♕a5 9 ♔b1 b4 10 ♘d5 e6 11 ♘f4 ♖b6!? already gave Black a strong attack in D.Guy-G.Morris, Swansea 2000.

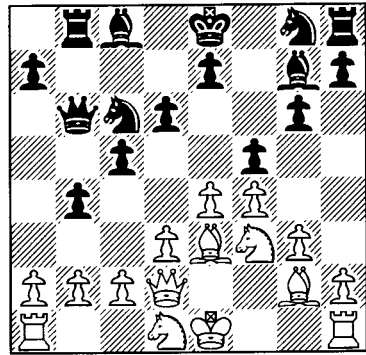
b) 8 ♘f3 (a much more sensible alternative) 8...b4 9 ♘d1 ♗g4 (Fischer's choice, but two good alternatives are

9...e5!?, directed against the white knight's position on f3, and the provocative 9...♘d4 10 ♘h4 ♕a5!? 11 0-0 e6 12 f4 ♘e7 of Je.Smith-S.Fraser, Wrexham 2005) 10 h3 ♗xf3 11 ♗xf3 ♘f6 12 ♗g2 0-0 13 0-0 ♖e8!? (preserving the powerful bishop on the long diagonal) 14 ♗h6 ♗h8 15 ♘e3 ♘d7 reached a typically unbalanced Closed Sicilian position in V.Smyslov-R.Fischer, Zagreb 1970.

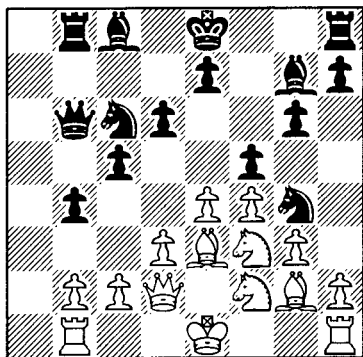
c) 8 f4 b4 9 ♘d1 can be met by 9...e6 and ...♘e7, but 9...♕b6!? is an approach which fits in much more with our fighting ethos. Black's queen not only increases his grip on d4, but also covers the c6-knight, thereby facilitating the counterstrike ...f5 when the position becomes quite complex.

White must now decide how to develop his kingside:

c1) 10 ♘e2?! is quite passive and, for example, 10...e6 11 0-0 ♘ge7 12 ♖b1 0-0 13 h3 f5! already left Black with the easier position in J.Cappon-V.Dimitrov, Koszalin 1999.

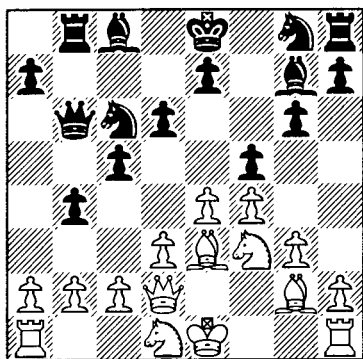
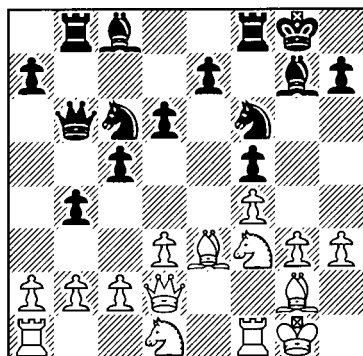
c2) 10 h3 might well be simply a waste of time after 10...f5. A.Ledger-J.Rowson, British League 2000, continued 11 ♘f3 (Black is also fine after 11 exf5 gxf5 followed by ...♘f6, transposing to 'c34', below, and 11 c3 bxc3 12 bxc3 e6 13 ♘e2 ♘ge7 14 0-0 0-0 again left White a little restricted in L.Efler-V.Grabliauskas, Pardubice 1996; ...♕a5 and ...♗a6 is a good way to increase the pressure in such a scenario with the b-file open) 11...♘f6 12 ♘h4 fxe4!? 13 dxe4 ♗b7 14 ♗f2?! ♘d4! 15 ♗xd4 cxd4 16 ♘f2 0-0 17 f5?! d5! and Black's powerful play already gave him some advantage. Notably leading Closed authority Andrew Ledger appears to have subsequently given up 8 f4, having only employed 8 ♘ge2 since this game.

c3) 10 ♘f3 f5!? leads to a further split:

c31) 11 e5?! (an ambitious gambit) 11...dxe5 12 ♕f2 exf4 13 ♗xc5 ♕c7! 14 0-0 fxg3 15 hxg3 ♘f6 16 ♖e1 0-0 17 ♘g5 ♖b5! was far from convincing for White in W.Spoelman-W.Hendriks, Dieren 2002.

c32) 11 a3 a5 12 axb4 axb4 13 ♖b1?! (an idea we saw in Line A1, but there White was much faster on the kingside; here it's quite misguided and White

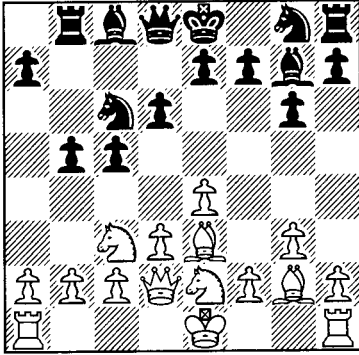
should prefer 13 0-0 when 13...♘h6 is about equal – Gallagher) 13...♘f6 14 ♘f2 (Black is also slightly better after 14 e5 ♘g4 15 exd6 exd6 16 h3 ♘xe3 17 ♕xe3+ ♘e7 since he has time to untangle with ...♗f6) 14...♘g4!

15 ♘xg4? fxg4 16 ♘h4 ♗c3! was a neat tactic to pick up the exchange in Y.Yudasin-S.Kiselev, Podolsk 1991.

c33) 11 h3 transposes to variation 'c2', above.;

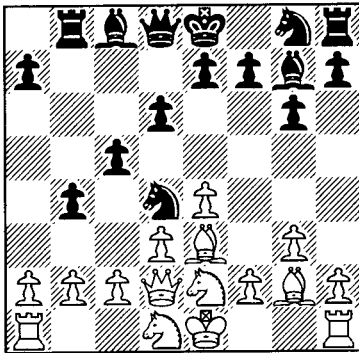
c34) 11 exf5 gxf5 12 0-0 ♘f6

13 h3 (White doesn't have to prevent ...♘g4 thus, but 13 d4?! is well met by 13...♘e4 and 13 ♔h1 0-0 14 ♗g1 ♘d4! 15 ♘e3 ♕c7 16 ♖fe1 e6 17 ♘c4 ♘xf3 18 ♗xf3 ♗d7 favoured Black in A.Salazar-C.Amura, San Jose do Rio Preto 1995; White often struggles for a plan against Black's strong c5, d6, e6 and f5 centre) 13...0-0

14 ♗f2 (it's easy for White to drift in such a position; for example, the alternative 14 ♘h2 saw Black seize the initiative with 14...♔h8!? 15 ♔h1 ♖g8 16 ♗f3 ♘d4 in G.Jamroz-K.Singer, Zakopane 2001) 14...♗d7 15 ♖e1 ♖be8 16 c3 e6 and now in A.Wojciechowska-K.Toma, Zakopane 2001, White correctly gave up e4 to gain some much needed activity with 17 d4! which was rather unclear.

c35) 11 0-0 ♘f6 12 e5!? (again White tries to play actively; instead 12 ♘f2 is well met by Gallagher's 12...♘g4! and after Pallardo Lozoya's 13 ♘xg4!? fxg4 14 ♘h4 ♗xb2 15 ♖ad1 White shouldn't have enough compensation with one promising idea being 15...♗e6!? 16 f5 gxf5, intending both 17 exf5 ♗xa2!? 18 ♕e2 ♘e5 and 17 ♘xf5 ♔d7!) 12...♘g4 13 exd6 exd6 14 ♔h1 0-0 15 ♗g1 ♗b7 16 h3 ♘f6 17 ♘e3 ♖be8 was quite comfortable for Black and about equal in

C.Morrison-V.Rajlich, Budapest 2000.

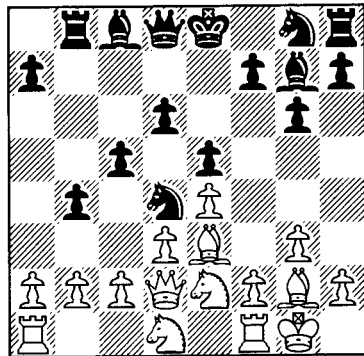
Returning to 8 ♘ge2:

8...b4

Black should force the pace, either like this or with 8...♘d4 9 0-0 (and not 9 ♘d1?! ♗g4!) 9...b4, transposing.

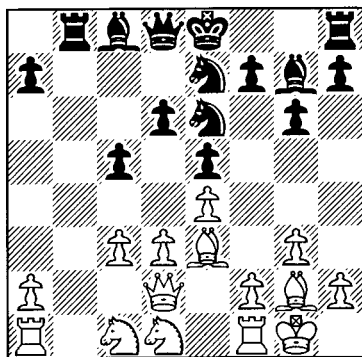
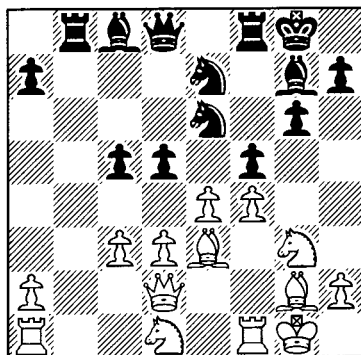
9 ♘d1 ♘d4

10 0-0

White would quite like to expel the d4-knight with c3 and without allowing it to then exchange itself on e2. However, he should avoid the immediate 10 ♘c1? ♗g4! which is a small trap which has claimed a few victims. Je.Smith-R.Palliser, Liverpool 2005, continued 11 ♗xd4 (relatively best since 11 f4 ♘f3+ 12 ♗xf3 ♗xf3 13 0-0 ♗xd1 14 ♕xd1 ♗xb2 15 ♖b1 ♗g7 16 d4 ♘f6! didn't really give White anything for the pawn in L.Drabke-K.Kulaots, Neckar 2004) 11...cxd4 12 0-0 ♘f6 13 f3 ♗d7 14 ♘f2 h5! 15 h3 ♗h6 16 f4 e5 and the absence of White's dark-squared bishop was already being sorely felt.

10...e5!

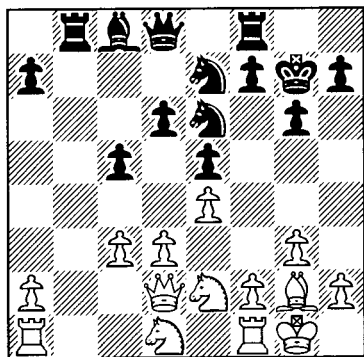
Having had a fair amount of experience on both sides of this position, I am convinced that Black's cause is best served by the creation of a Botvinnik set-up. It is a more ambitious choice than 10...e6, but White is not in a position to exploit that and he often finds his attacking schemes hampered by a pawn exchange on f4. Furthermore, 10...e6 11 ♘c1 ♘e7 (11...♕a5?! 12 a3! is even worse for Black) 12 c3 bxc3 13 bxc3 ♘dc6 14 ♗h6 0-0 15 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 16 ♘e3 gives White any small advantage that might be going.

11 c3

White must avoid 11 h3? ♗xh3!, although after the text Black can free his position through exchanges. White might thus prefer:

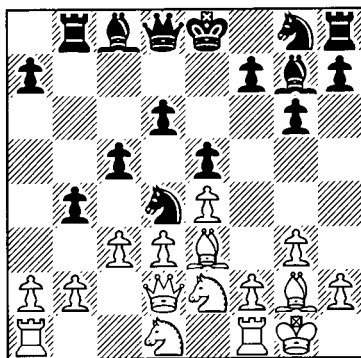
a) 11 ♘c1 ♘e7 12 c3 (or 12 f4 exf4! 13 ♗xf4 0-0 14 ♖f2 – 14 c3 bxc3 15 bxc3 ♘e6 16 ♗h6 d5, as analysed by Golod, illustrates Black's alternative central break – 14...f5 15 c3 bxc3 16 bxc3 ♘e6 17 ♗h6 ♗xh6 18 ♕xh6 fxe4 19 dxe4 ♘c6 was very comfortable for Black in A.Ledger-R.Palliser, York 2004; the downside to placing the white knights on d1 and c1 is that they can take some time to improve, and Black is quite fast to open the centre and gain counterplay) 12...bxc3 13 bxc3 ♘e6! leaves Black with quite a harmonious set-up as his e6-knight supports advances of both the d- and f-pawns. We now have a further branch:

a1) 14 f4?! exf4 15 gxf4 (not the ideal recapture as now White's central pawns can be fixed, but even worse would be to give up the dark-squared bishop and leave the powerful g7-bishop without an opponent) 15...f5! 16 ♘e2 0-0 17 ♘g3 (White has unsurprisingly struggled in this position due to his lack of a clear plan; both 17 ♔h1 d5! 18 exd5 ♘xd5 19 ♗g1 ♗b7 20 ♖b1 ♘b6 21 ♘e3 ♗xg2+ 22 ♔xg2 ♕d6, which highlighted the weakness of d3 and f4 in T.Aliev-I.Tsesarsky, Kiryat Shmuel 1997, and 17 ♗f2 ♗a6! 18 ♗h4 ♕d7 19 ♘e3 fxe4 20 dxe4?! ♗xe2 21 ♕xe2 ♘xf4, P.Llaneza Vega-E.Cosma, Benasque 2001, were also excellent for Black) 17...d5!

18 exf5 (after the second of Black's pawn breaks White is already in some trouble; he might try and close the position with 18 e5?!, but after 18...d4 19 ♗f2 ♗b7 his minor pieces are severely restricted and 20 c4?! ♗xg2 21 ♔xg2 ♗h6 22 ♘e2 ♘c6 picks up a pawn on e5 or f4) 18...♘xf5 19 ♘xf5 ♖xf5 20 d4 (perhaps White should prefer 20 ♗h3!?, although Golod's intention against that gives Black a strong initiative: 20...♖h5! 21 ♗xe6+ ♗xe6 22 ♗xc5 d4 with excellent activity and pressure for the pawn) 20...♕a5, increasing the pressure against d4 and intending 21 dxc5 d4, left Black clearly better in M.Uritzky-V.Golod, Israel 1997.

a2) 14 ♘e2 0-0 15 ♗h6 ♗xh6 16 ♕xh6 ♗a6 17 ♕d2 d5 18 exd5 ♘xd5 19 ♘b2 ♘f6! 20 ♖fd1 ♕c7 21 ♖ab1 ♖fd8 saw straightforward play against the

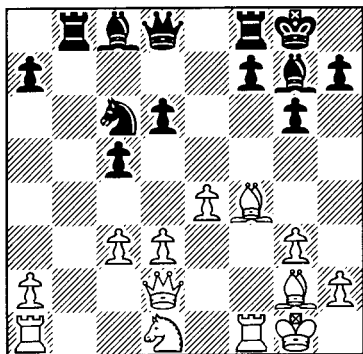
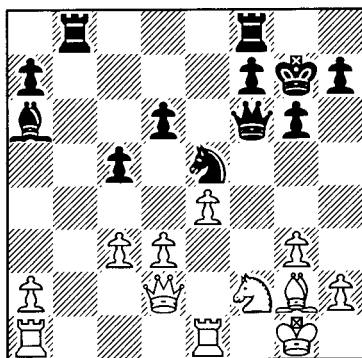
weak d3-pawn give Black an edge in J.Houska-R.Palliser, Bayswater (rapid) 2006.

a3) 14 ♗h6! (relatively best, not that this brings White anywhere near an advantage) 14...0-0 15 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 16 ♘e2 (alternatively, 16 f4 is, of course, met by 16...exf4 17 gxf4 f5, while A.Ledger-J.Donaldson, Isle of Man 1997, was agreed drawn in a level position after 16 ♘e3 f5! 17 exf5 ♘xf5 18 ♘e2 ♘xe3 19 ♕xe3 ♕g5)

16...f5 (now White gets to force some liquidation; Black might also consider 16...d5, but after 17 exd5 ♘xd5 18 ♘e3 – ½-½, M.Uritzky-G.Livshits, Israeli Team Championship 2003 – 18...♘xe3 19 ♕xe3 ♕d6 20 f4 exf4 21 ♘xf4 ♘xf4 22 ♕xf4 ♕xf4 23 ♖xf4 ♖d8 White should again be able to hold the ending) 17 f4! exf4 18 ♘xf4 ♘xf4 19 ♖xf4 fxe4 20 ♖xf8 ♕xf8 21 dxe4 ♘c6! 22 ♘e3 ♘e5 23 ♖f1 ♕d8 24 ♖d1 ♗e6 unsurprisingly shortly led to a draw in J.Houska-B.Lalic, British League 2004.

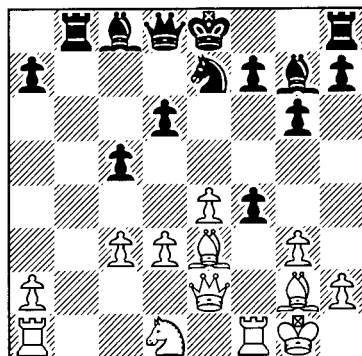
b) 11 f4 ♗g4!? (countering in similar vein; Black can play more solidly with 11...exf4 when 12 ♘xf4 ♘e7 13 c3 bxc3 14 bxc3 ♘e6 is about even) 12 ♘c1 exf4 (Black can also develop with 12...♘e7, but this disregards an important principle in this variation, namely that Black should continue to challenge in the centre; here 13 c3 bxc3 14 bxc3 ♘dc6 15 f5! gxf5 16 exf5 f6 17 h3 ♗h5 18 ♗h6 gave White a few kingside prospects in L.Peszterícz-P.Enders, Balatonlelle 2006) 13 gxf4!? (White's most uncompromising option in this whole variation; instead 13 ♗xf4 ♗xd1 14 ♕xd1 ♘e7 15 ♖b1 0-0 16 ♘e2 ♘ec6 left Black's strong centralized knights at least the equal of White's bishops in T.Kveliashvili-M.Havranek, Decin 1996) 13...♘e7 14 c3 bxc3 15 bxc3 ♘b5 16 a4 ♘c7 17 ♘f2!? (the more ambitious 17 f5?! gxf5! 18 ♗h6 ♖g8 19 ♗xg7 ♖xg7 20 ♕h6 ♔f8 didn't turn out too well for White in L.Rouillon-S.Fuks, Lvov 1999) 17...♗e6 18 ♘e2 0-0 19 d4 cxd4 20 ♘xd4 ♗c4 and this unbalanced Sicilian position is roughly level.

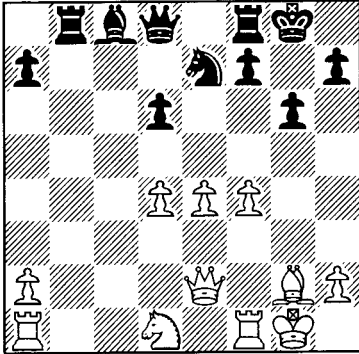
Returning to 11 c3:

11...bxc3 12 bxc3 ♘xe2+ 13 ♕xe2 ♘e7 14 f4

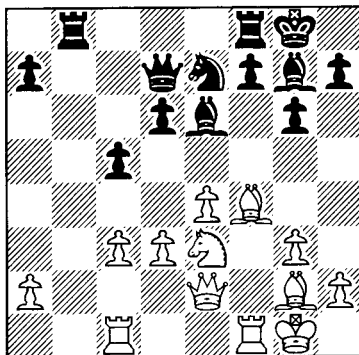
White can also delay this, preferring

to first improve his queen's position with 14 ♕d2 and then 14...0-0 (Black should delay committing his queen's bishop: 14...♗a6?! is well met by Golod's 15 c4! when Black's light-squared bishop suddenly wishes it was on e6) 15 f4 (the alternative is 15 ♗h6 when Golod's analysis offers 15...d5!? which he assessed as unclear; continuing this line we find that after 16 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 17 exd5 ♘xd5 18 ♘e3 ♘xe3! both 19 fxe3 ♗a6 20 ♖fd1 f5 and 19 ♕xe3 ♕d6 20 ♖fe1 f6 leave Black a touch better) 15...exf4 16 ♗xf4 ♘c6

17 ♗h6 (17 ♔h1?! is a waste of time, but did allow Black to demonstrate how to exploit his queenside pressure in M.Uritzky-I.Tsesarsky, Tel Aviv 1997: 17...♘e5 18 ♘f2 ♗a6 19 ♖ab1 ♕a5 20 ♖b3 ♖xb3! 21 axb3 ♖b8 22 ♖b1 ♗c8 23 ♕c1 ♕a2! 24 ♖b2 ♕a3 25 ♖b1 ♕xc1+ 26 ♗xc1 ♗e6 and Black went on to grind out the full point) 17...♗a6 (as c4 isn't now an option, increasing the pressure becomes possible, although Black was also fine after 17...♗e6 18 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 19 ♘e3 ♕a5 20 ♘f5+!? ♔h8! in A.Ledger-A.Cherniaev, Hastings 2000) 18 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 19 ♘f2 (White has better chances to equalize after 19 ♘e3 ♘e5 20 c4) 19...♘e5 20 ♖fe1 was assessed as being equal by Emms, but after 20...♕f6!? I'd still prefer to be Black;

for example, 21 d4 ♘f3+ 22 ♗xf3 ♕xf3 23 ♖e3?! ♖b2! leaves White's pawns by far the more vulnerable.

14...exf4

Our standard recapture, whereas 14...0-0?! 15 fxe5! ♗xe5 16 ♗h6 ♗g7 17 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 18 ♘e3 ♗e6 19 ♖f2 saw White build up on the kingside, while Black was a little low on counterplay in A.Ledger-D.Lopushnoy, Ubeda 1998.

15 ♗xf4

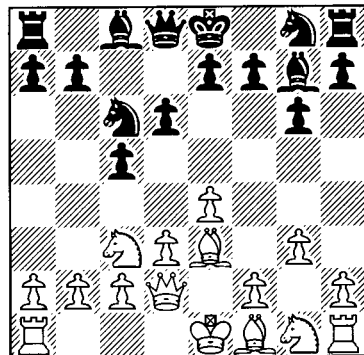
The alternative is 15 gxf4 0-0 16 d4 (or 16 ♔h1 f5!? 17 e5 dxe5 18 ♗xc5 ♗a6 and Black was again slightly better in Petrov-A.Bangiev, USSR 1973) 16...cxd4! 17 ♗xd4 ♗xd4+ 18 cxd4

18...♕b6 (or 18...d5!? – White's three abreast centre is always vulnerable to such a strike; it then becomes fixed and Black gains control of the f5-square) 19 ♕f2 ♗a6 20 ♖e1 ♘c6 21 d5 ♘b4 22 ♕xb6 ♖xb6 23 ♘e3 ♘d3 24 ♖f1 ♖b2 saw Black break through on the queenside, gaining some advantage in A.Gavrilov-V.Verdihanov, Decin 1997.

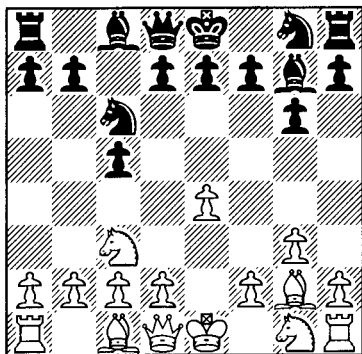
15...0-0 16 ♖c1 ♗e6 17 ♘e3 ♕d7

Black enjoys comfortable equality and retains options both in the centre and on the queenside. White might occupy d5, but then he risks being left with a bad bishop. That's exactly what happened in the model game A.Zwaig-S.Gligoric, Havana Olympiad 1966:

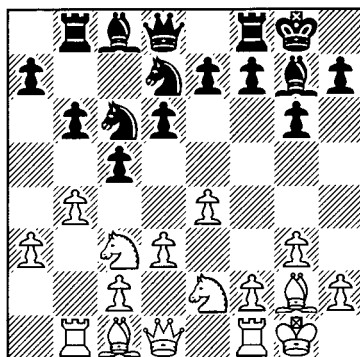
18 ♖fd1 ♘c6 19 ♘d5?! ♖be8 20 ♕c2 ♗xd5! 21 exd5 ♘e5 22 ♖e1 c4! 23 dxc4 ♘xc4 24 ♖e2 ♕c7 25 ♖ce1 ♖xe2 26 ♕xe2 ♘e5 27 ♖c1 ♖b8 28 c4 ♘d7 29 h3 ♗e5! 30 ♗xe5 ♕c5+ 31 ♕f2 ♕xf2+ 32 ♔xf2 ♘xe5 33 ♖c2 ♘d3+ 34 ♔e3 ♘c5 35 ♗f3 h5 36 h4 ♔g7 37 ♖h2 ♖b4 38 ♔d4 ♖a4 39 ♖b2 ♖a3 40 ♗e2 ♖xg3 0-1

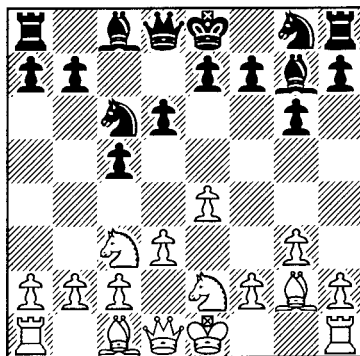
6...♖b8 is a good alternative after 6 ♗e3 to our standard ...♘f6 treatment. As Black appears to be rather comfortable after 10...e5, do not be surprised if 8 f4 begins to mount something of a comeback.

A Tricky Move Order

Before progressing to White's less common 6th move options, we should note that some ♗e3 exponents prefer to delay ♗g2 with 1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 d3. This isn't a problem for 6...♖b8 players since after 4...♗g7 5 ♗e3 d6 6 ♕d2

6...♖b8 White has nothing better than 7 ♗g2 transposing to Line A22. However, those seeking to play Line A21 need to be more careful: 4 d3 ♗g7 5 ♗e3 d6 6 ♕d2 ♘f6 7 ♗h6 sees White immediately forcing his desired trade of dark-squared bishops. Instead Black should prefer the move order 4...d6! 5 ♗e3 ♘f6 and then 6 ♕d2?! runs into 6...♘g4, 6 h3?! d5! gives Black the initiative, and 6 ♗g2 ♗g7 is Line A21.

A3)
1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7

5 d3

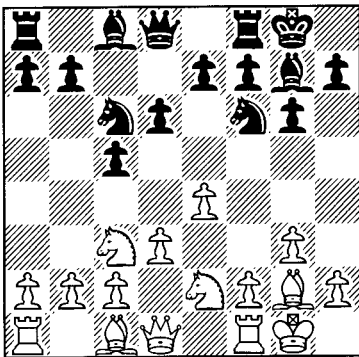
White can also begin with 5 ♘ge2 d6 6 0-0 ♘f6 when 7 d3 transposes to our main line, but there is also 7 a3!?, the Murey system. White wants to begin by playing on the queenside, but Black should be fine so long as he isn't too ambitious: 7...0-0 8 ♖b1 ♘d7 (Black must, of course, avoid 8...b6?? 9 e5, but he might also switch to a Botvinnik set-up and 8...e5!? 9 b4 b6 10 d3 ♗e6 11 ♘d5 ♗xd5! 12 exd5 ♘e7 13 c4 ♘d7 saw Black unbalance the position in quite a reasonable way in E.Maahs-G.Bagaturov, Willingen 1999) 9 d3 ♖b8 10 b4 b6, to be followed by ...e6, ...♘d4 and ...♗b7 in some order was certainly very solid in J.Van der Wiel-A.Naiditsch, Essen 2002.

5...d6 6 ♘ge2

6...♘f6

Consistent with our general approach, but fans of Line A22 may wish to prefer 6...♖b8 here too since play often transposes after 7 ♗e3 b5 8 ♕d2. Instead 7 0-0 b5 8 f4 (8 a3 can be met by either ...e6 and ...♘ge7 or 8...♘f6 9 h3 0-0 when 10 ♗e3 transposes to note 'b' to White's 9th move, below) 8...b4 9 ♘d5 has received a few outings, but

fails to impress and 9...♗b7 10 ♖b1 e6 11 ♘e3 f5! 12 c3 ♘ge7 was about equal in O.Lechner-S.Joachim, Schwaebisch Gmuend 2001.

7 0-0

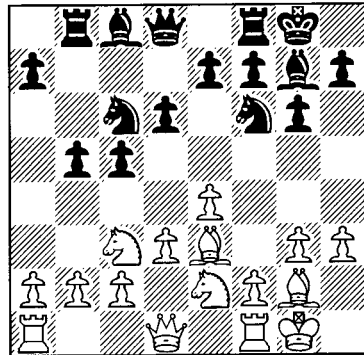
White's most popular and flexible move, but should he be after a set-up with ♗e3, the moves h3, ♗e3 and 0-0 can be played in any order. Following 7 ♗e3 0-0 8 0-0 ♖b8 (Black might prefer 8...e5!?, transposing instead to Line A21) 9 h3 play has transposed to the note to White's 9th move, below, as it also does after 7 ♗e3 0-0 8 h3 ♖b8 (or 8...e5 and now 9 0-0 is the main line of Line A21, while 9 ♕d2 ♘d4 is also considered there in note 'c' to White's 8th move) 9 0-0 (9 ♕d2 b5 10 ♗h6!? was an independent try in H.Westerinen-M.Rytshagov, Kuopio 1992, but Black should have gained good counterplay with 10...b4 11 ♘d5 e6 12 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 13 ♘e3 ♘d4 14 0-0 e5! 15 f4 ♘h5!).

7...0-0

8 h3

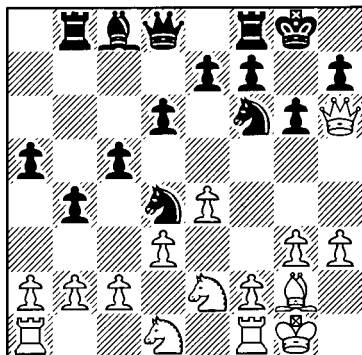
Eliminating any notion of ...♘g4 once and for all, and White usually inserts this either here or after 8 f4 ♖b8. This pawn push also supports a later g4 and ♘g3. Indeed if White wants to launch an attack it will have to be with his pawns: not only is his king's knight less aggressively placed on e2 than f3, but it also eliminates the option of a piece attack (f5, g4, ♕e1-h4, ♗h6 and ♘g5).

White has also been known to switch to contesting the queenside with 8 a3!? ♖b8 9 ♖b1 b5 10 b4. Now Black might well consider giving up control of d4 to open further queenside lines with 10...cxb4!? 11 axb4 a5 12 bxa5 b4 13 ♘d5 ♕xa5, but in practice he has usually settled for 10...a6. N.Short-C.Deepan, Commonwealth Championship, Mumbai 2006, continued 11 ♗e3 ♘g4!? 12 ♗d2 ♘d4 13 h3 ♘e5 14 ♘xd4 cxd4 15 ♘e2 and now Black would have gained a perfectly satisfactory position with 15...♕b6 and if 16 f4, then Martin's 16...♘c6, after which Black can arrange ...a5.

8...♖b8 9 f4

The most aggressive and a move which also prevents ...b5. Less critical is 9 ♗e3 b5 and then:

a) 10 d4 is nothing to worry about since 10...cxd4 11 ♘xd4 gives Black an improved version of the fianchetto Dragon (11...♘e5 looks like a good follow-up) and he can also consider the 10...b4!? 11 ♘d5 ♘d7, intending ...♗a6 and ...e6, of M.Emiroglu-S.Mueschenich, German League 2006.

b) 10 a3 a5 (10...♗d7 11 f4 a5?! was an instructive mistake in N.Short-L.McShane, Reykjavik 2000: 12 a4! b4 13 ♘b5 ♘e8 14 ♖b1! and 15 c4 kept the queenside closed) 11 ♕d2 (now 11 a4 can be met by 11...b4 12 ♘b5 ♗a6 13 c4 bxc3 14 ♘exc3 ♘e8 when White can't maintain his hold on b5 and Black wrenches open some much-needed queenside lines) 11...b4 12 axb4 axb4 13 ♘d5!? saw White determined not to have his knight buried on d1 (compare with note 'c', below) in M.Adams-L.Van Wely, Frankfurt (rapid) 1999, but after 13...♘d7 14 ♗h6 Black could have forced simplification with 14...♗xb2!? 15 ♗xf8 ♗xa1 16 ♘xe7+ ♘xe7 17 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 18 ♖xa1 ♗b7 when the position is about even.

c) 10 ♕d2 b4 11 ♘d1 a5 12 ♗h6 (12 f4 has also been seen, but Black doesn't have to transpose to our main line with 12...♗d7 and instead 12...♘e8 13 g4 ♘c7 14 ♘g3 ♗a6 saw him preparing ...c4 in B.Baum-S.Ratar Kis, Harkany 2001) 12...♗xh6!? (Black might as well force White to lose some time with his queen, although the solid 12...♘d4 13 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 14 f4 e5 15 ♔h2 ♘h5! 16 f5 h6 17 ♘e3 ♘f6 was also fine in S.Rublevsky-I.Khairullin, Russian Championship, Moscow 2006) 13 ♕xh6 ♘d4 (gaining counterplay against c2, just like in Line A1)

14 ♘xd4?! (opening the c-file like this is rarely good, although even in the case of 14 ♕d2 Black retains good counterplay with 14...a4) 14...cxd4 15 f4?! (White also failed to equalize with the relatively better 15 c4 bxc3 16 bxc3 after 16...♕b6 17 ♖c1 ♗e6 18 ♕d2 d5 in J.Houska-J.Dworakowska, German League 2003; once again we can see that the d1-knight only really gets in the way after the exchange on d4) 15...♖b5! 16 g4 ♕c7 17 ♖c1 ♖c5 saw Black waste no time in targeting c2 in J.Emms-S.B.Hansen, German League 2002, and after 18 ♖f2 ♗xg4! 19 hxg4 ♘xg4 20 ♕h4 ♘xf2 21 ♘xf2 ♖xc2 he enjoyed a large advantage.

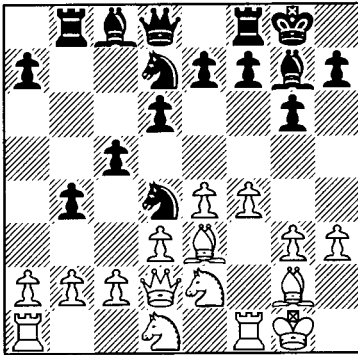
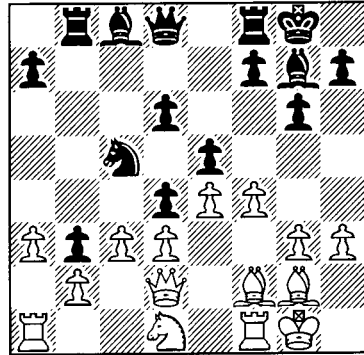
9...♘d7!?

In Line A1 this knight needed to stay on f6, but here, as we remarked above, White finds it harder to conduct a kingside attack with his knight on e2. Thus Black has the time to redeploy his king's knight and also prepare ...b5. A more popular re-routing occurs with 9...♗d7 10 ♗e3 b5 11 a3 ♘e8 (and not

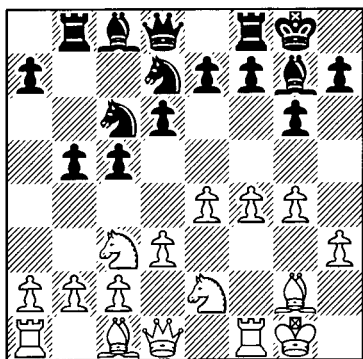
11...a5?! 12 a4!), but after 12 d4 cxd4 13 ♘xd4 b4 the position can quickly fizzle out, as it did in B.Spassky-R.Fischer, 22nd matchgame, Belgrade 1992.

10 g4

White wastes no time on the kingside, but he also tried:

a) 10 ♗e3 b5 (consistent, although Black can also exploit the move order to begin with 10...♘d4) 11 ♕d2 b4 12 ♘d1 ♘d4

13 ♘xd4 (c2 isn't so easy to attack here, but this is still a capture White would prefer to avoid and so perhaps he should prefer: 13 ♘c1 f5! – if White can hold Black up by avoiding an exchange of knights, so too can Black hold proceedings up on the kingside – 14 c3 bxc3 15 bxc3 ♘e6 16 exf5 gxf5 17 ♖e1 ♘b6 18 ♗f2 ♘c7 was unclear in R.Hoen-V.Hort, Havana 1966, although Black's queenside play and extra central pawn are trumps which persist into any endgame; 13 f5!? is the other option when Black might gain time by exchanging on e2 or shore up his kingside with 13...♗a6!? 14 ♘xd4 cxd4 15 ♗h6 ♘e5 16 ♘f2 ♗xh6 17 ♕xh6 f6 18 fxg6 hxg6 19 ♘g4 ♕e8 20 ♘xe5 dxe5 before turning his attention to the c-file) 13...cxd4 14 ♗f2 ♘c5 15 a3 b3 16 c3 e5! (keeping White tied up with his knight stuck on d1)

17 ♖e1 and now 17...♗a6 was a good alternative to the game's 17...f5!? in V.Gashimov-J.Smeets, Istanbul 2005; in both cases Black has the initiative and is slightly for preference.

b) 10 a4 a6 11 ♘d5!? (an intriguing idea to limit Black's counterplay before touching the kingside; 11 g4 b5 12 axb5 axb5 13 g5!? b4 14 ♘d5 is similar and Black had a fair share of the chances after 14...f6! 15 gxf6 ♘xf6 16 ♘e3 ♗d7 17 c3 e6 in E.Gibney-W.Krzyzanowski, correspondence 2002) 11...b5 12 axb5 axb5 13 c3 e6 14 ♘e3 saw White ready with g4 and f5 in the game R.Berzinsh-A.Galliamova, Nabereznye Chelny 1993, and now 14...b4!? 15 c4 ♗b7 16 f5 ♘d4 would have been fine for Black, since 17 ♘g4 (trying to force through a deadly f6) can be met effectively by 17...exf5 18 ♘h6+ ♔h8 19 exf5 ♗xg2 20 ♔xg2 ♖a8.

10...b5

11 ♘g3

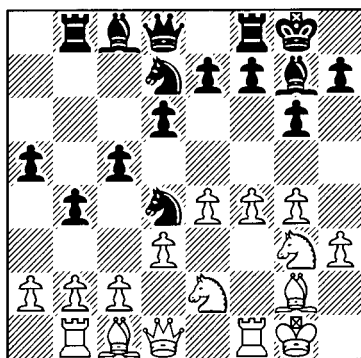
Probably the most challenging since 11 f5 b4 12 ♘d5 e6! (driving back the knight and now Black can aim to keep control of the h4-d8 diagonal, thereby preventing any pawn-storm) 13 ♘e3 (or 13 ♘df4 ♘de5 14 c3 bxc3 15 bxc3 ♕a5!? 16 ♔h1 ♗d7 and Black's queenside play was well advanced in N.Lakos-G.Feher, Hungarian League 2002; now 17 g5!? would have been the critical test when Black might respond sensibly in Scheveningen-style with 17...exf5 18 exf5 ♖e8 19 f6 ♗f8, but also possible is the radical 18...♗xf5!? 19 d4 cxd4 20 cxd4 ♘b4 21 dxe5 dxe5 with plenty of activity to compensate for the piece) 13...♘d4 14 ♘f4 ♘e5 15 ♗d2 (15 c3!? might be a better try, but 15...♘dc6 sees Black maintain his powerful knight on e5 since 16 d4? fails to 16...cxd4 17 cxd4 ♘xd4!) 15...♗d7 16 ♕e1 ♗f6! 17 ♘e2 ♗h4 18 ♕d1 a5 gave Black the edge in A.Skripchenko-A.Naiditsch, 6th match-game, Dortmund 2001.

11...b4

Black's main move, but as White has lost control of the d4-square, 11...c4!? also deserves consideration, as in V.Onischuk-Y.Vovk, Lviv 2007: 12 ♘ce2 (White might need to try and improve here, but presumably Onischuk didn't like the look of 12 f5 cxd3 13 cxd3 b4 14 ♘d5 ♗a6 when d3 quickly comes under pressure) 12...♕b6+ 13 ♔h1 cxd3 14 cxd3 b4 15 f5 b3! 16 a3 ♗a6 17 ♘f4 ♖fc8 18 g5 ♕c5 19 h4 ♕c2 and Black was better. Once White plays f5 and g5, so long as Black prevents a powerful f6-advance, the attack often depends on h4-h5 which can be quite slow.

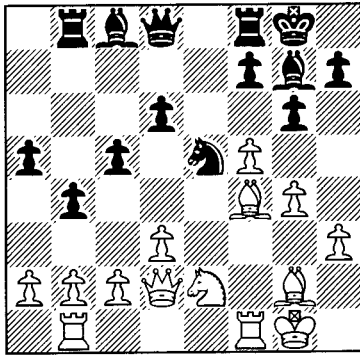
12 ♘ce2 a5 13 ♖b1

A useful prophylactic move, ensuring that White can keep lines relatively closed with 13...a4 14 b3, whereas 13 f5?! a4 14 c3 a3! saw Black lever open the queenside in T.Thissen-P.Doggers, Hengelo 1995.

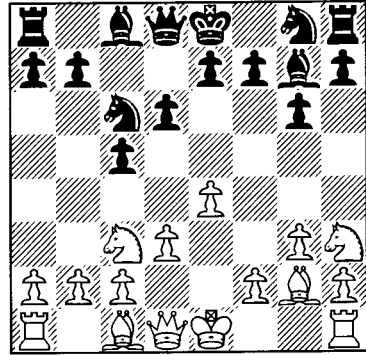
13...♘d4

We've reached quite an unclear and tense position, typical of Black's aims after 6...♘f6 in general and especially 9...♘d7!? here. Here are a couple of examples of how play can continue:

a) 14 ♗e3 ♗a6 15 ♕d2 a4 16 h4?! (probably not best, although ...b3 was

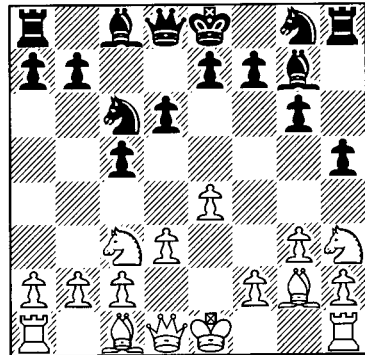
threatened, and if 16 c3, Black has 16...♘xe2+ 17 ♘xe2 ♕a5 and ...a3 follows) 16...e5! (seizing the chance to split up White's encroaching pawns) 17 g5 exf4 18 ♘xf4 b3 19 axb3 axb3 20 c3 ♘c2 21 ♗f2 ♘e5 left Black in control in S.Yuferov-O.Dementiev, Grozny 1968.

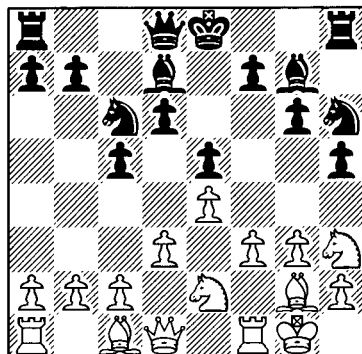
b) 14 f5 ♘xe2+ (Black might also consider 14...a4!?, intending to only challenge after 15 b3 axb3 16 axb3 with 16...e6) 15 ♘xe2 e6 (breaking up the white pawn mass, but 15...♘e5 is also possible; for example, 16 ♗g5 ♗b7 when ...d5 is the plan and 17 ♕e1 well met by 17...♕d7 18 ♕h4 f6! 19 ♗e3 ♕a4, gaining good counterplay) 16 ♗f4 ♘e5 17 ♕d2 exf5 18 exf5 was the course of L.Kritz-E.Alekseev, Biel 2006.

This battle between two young and talented grandmasters saw Black settle for the solid 18...gxf5 19 gxf5 ♔h8, which was fine, although Alekseev later lost his way. An alternative defence was 18...♗b7!? 19 ♗h6 ♗xg2 20 ♔xg2 ♗xh6 21 ♕xh6 f6 which is unclear; the e5-knight holds things together, but White's knight also has good prospects. Here White must avoid 22 ♘f4? due to 22...♘f7 23 ♕h4 g5 and instead 22 d4 cxd4 23 ♘xd4 ♕b6 24 ♘e6 ♖f7 leaves both kings exposed and is probably about equal.

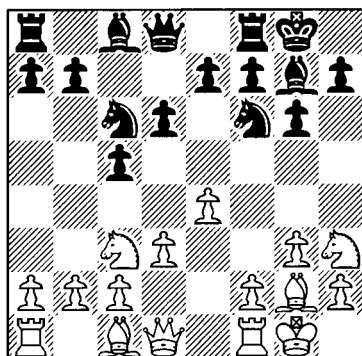
A4)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7 5 d3 d6 6 ♘h3

This is quite rare. White's idea is generally to avoid the main lines, while leaving his f-pawn free to advance.

6...♘f6

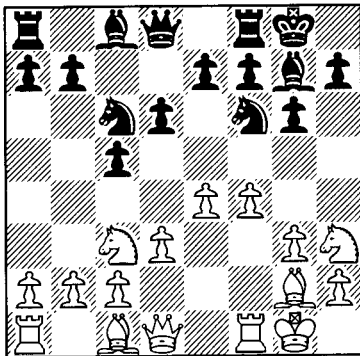
Consistent with our overall approach against the Closed Sicilian, but Black has a fighting alternative available in 6...h5!? and now:

a) 7 f4 ♗g4 8 ♕d2 is a fighting response when play usually continues 8...♘d4 9 ♘g1!. That is far from clear, but as 6 ♘h3 players are probably ready with an idea or two there, I prefer 8...h4!?. This has only received the one outing so far, but appears to be in no way inferior: 9 ♘f2 (9 gxh4?! is rather anti-positional and allows Black a number of reasonable replies, including 9...♘d4 10 ♕f2 ♗xh3 11 ♗xh3 e6) 9...♗d7 10 ♘e2 (perhaps White should ease the kingside tension with 10 g4; not that Black has any worries after 10...♘f6 11 h3 ♕a5 and he might even consider the ambitious pawn sacrifice 10...h3!? 11 ♗xh3 ♘f6, intending both ...♖h4 and 12 f5 ♘e5) 10...e5!? (fighting for the dark squares, but 10...♘f6 11 c3 ♕b6 followed by going long was also quite reasonable) 11 c3 ♘f6 12 ♕e3 ♕b6! was far from clear, but the black position was certainly the easier to handle in M.Krasenkow-B.Grabarczyk, Polish Championship, Sopot 1997.

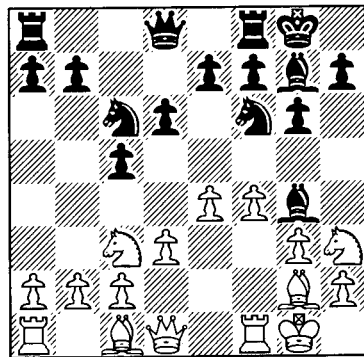
b) 7 0-0 has been preferred by Short, but this is not necessarily a safer alternative since Black might still go long: 7...♘h6! (the most flexible choice and one which makes good use of Black's 6th; instead 7...♘f6 8 ♘d5! ♘e5 9 f3 h4 10 g4 saw White keep the kingside closed and thereby gain the advantage in N.Short-S.Williams, British League 2003) 8 f3 (it's not that easy to find a good move here for White and the later 8 ♘f4 h4 only saw Black gain a strong initiative following 9 ♘ce2 e6 10 c3 ♘g4 11 d4?! hxg3 12 hxg3 ♘h2! 13 ♖e1 e5 14 ♘d5 ♗g4 in C.Frick-E.Schmittdiel, Böblingen 1999) 8...♗d7 9 ♘e2 e5 (keeping the white pieces rather bottled up)

10 c3 ♕b6 11 ♔h1 0-0-0 12 ♕c2 ♔b8 13 ♗e3 ♕c7 14 ♖fc1 ♕c8 15 ♘f2 ♘e7 was again far from clear, although Black's attack later prevailed in D.Suttles-P.Benko, US Championship, New York 1965.

7 0-0 0-0

8 f4

White has also been known to delay this with 8 ♔h1 ♖b8 (8...♗g4!? 9 f3 ♗xh3 10 ♗xh3 ♖b8 looks like a good alternative, borrowing an idea which Black has also employed on his 7th move) and now:

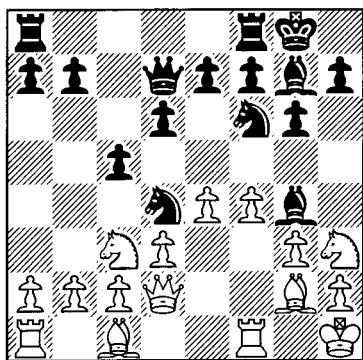
a) 9 f4 b5 10 ♘g1 (this regrouping could be taken as a sign that the future grandmaster didn't believe in his attacking chances) 10...b4 11 ♘ce2 ♕b6! 12 h3 and now 12...a5 saw Black race onwards in J.Shaw-J.Rowson, Scottish Championship 1994, but also pretty reasonable was 12...c4!? when Black is well advanced on the queenside, and if 13 dxc4 then 13...♗e6 regains the pawn with advantage.

b) 9 a3!? b5 10 ♖b1 takes time out to halt Black with a common Closed Sicilian positional device, and one which we've already encountered. Here, however, Black appears to be able to get away with falling into the trap: 10...a5!? (10...♘e8 instead is a principled alternative) 11 a4 b4 12 ♘b5 d5 and due to the white knight's position on h3, Black had sufficient central play in the game V.Sergeev-J.Michenka, Trinec 2001.

8...♗g4

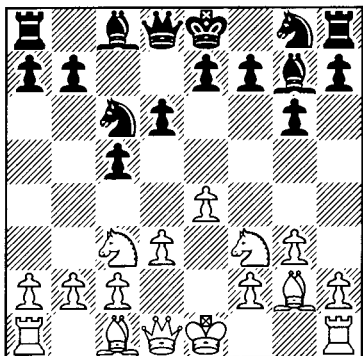
The safe choice, again taking advantage of the knight's position to complete development. A more risky, extremely undiscovered, but by no means unplayable option is 8...♖b8!? 9 f5 b5, simply continuing as in Lines A1 and A3. The only example I could dig up continued 10 g4 (consistent, although now White cannot retreat his knight to e2) 10...b4 11 ♘d5 (K.Ederer-J.Novak, correspondence 1997), and now 11...♘xd5!? 12 exd5 ♘d4 (threatening to capture on f5) 13 ♗e4 a5 remains quite unbalanced. Tests are required here!

9 ♕d2

It might look like White is getting into a tangle, but he hopes to embarrass the slightly loose bishop on g4. The alternative is 9 ♕e1 ♘d4 10 ♕f2, after which 10...♕d7 11 ♘g5 h6 12 ♘f3 ♘xf3+ 13 ♗xf3 ♖ab8 was about equal in H.Emser-F.Josting, Tiefenbach 2005, and Black can also consider the more ambitious 10...h6!? 11 ♔h1 b5 12 ♘g1 b4 of A.Shakhov-A.Nikanorov, St Petersburg 1997.

9...♘d4 10 ♔h1 ♕d7!

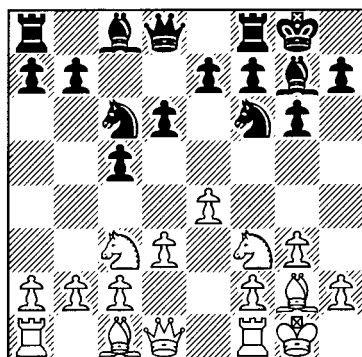
Black will now have to retreat his bishop, but while White is untangling his position, he can open the centre and begin counterplay.

A.Medina Garcia-P.Benko, Malaga 1970, continued 11 ♘g1 ♗e6 12 ♘d1 d5 13 c3 ♘c6 14 e5 ♘e8 (preparing ...f6 with 14...♘g4!? might be even better; Black's knight will be more actively placed on h6 than c7) 15 d4 cxd4 16 cxd4 f6 and the complex manoeuvring struggle continued; Black, for his part, would quite like to exchange the light-squared bishops and follow up with ...♘c7-e6, as indeed Benko later achieved.

A5)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7 5 d3 d6 6 ♘f3

It might appear a little strange to block the key white f-pawn like this, but we should note that this variation can occur from a number of move orders, many of which see White playing ♘f3 before fianchettoing. Furthermore, the position is, of course, still a reversed English. Black's play here is not particularly hard to understand, but any diligent readers who wish to further explore this variation should compare it with 1 c4 e5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7 5 ♘f3 ♘f6 6 d3 d6 7 0-0 0-0 8 ♖b1.

6...♘f6

The simplest approach. A popular alternative is to head for a Botvinnik set-up with 6...e5 7 0-0 ♘ge7, but that allows White to usefully redeploy his king's knight with 8 ♘d2.

7 0-0 0-0

8 h3

Just like in Line A3, this is a very popular insertion, allowing White to proceed with ♗e3 and ♕d2 in peace. Alternatively:

a) 8 ♗e3 ♖b8 is very likely to transpose after 9 h3.

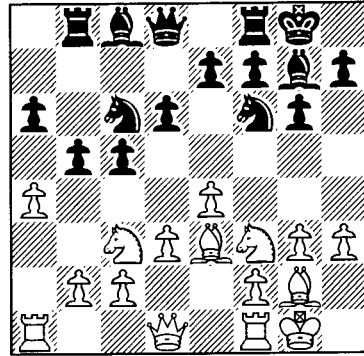
b) 8 ♗g5 h6 9 ♗d2 ♖b8 10 ♕c1?! scarcely troubles Black who enjoyed a slight advantage after 10...♔h7 11 ♘h4 ♘d4 12 ♖e1 b5 13 ♘e2 ♘xe2+ 14 ♖xe2 e5 in B.Danet-V.Ikonnikov, Saint Affrique 1997. Note White's lack of a good plan here; something which is far from uncommon should he handle the opening stage too sedately.

c) 8 ♘h4 could be met by 8...♖b8 9 f4 ♘d7, but in V.Malaniuk-M.Chiburdanidze, Baku 1979, Black preferred to change tack with White's knight committed to h4: 8...e5!? 9 f4 exf4! 10 ♗xf4 (and not, of course, 10 gxf4? due to 10...♘xe4) 10...h6 11 ♗d2 ♘d4 12 ♔h1 ♗g4 and Black was comfortable.

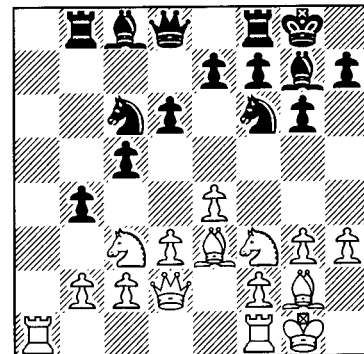
8...♖b8 9 a4

Yet again we see White facing the dilemma of whether or not to open the a-file. The alternative is 9 ♗e3 b5 (just as with a4 and ...a6 included, 9...e5!? is a decent alternative) 10 ♕d2 b4 11 ♘e2 ♘d7 (11...e5 is again quite tempting) 12 ♗h6!? (or 12 d4 ♘a5! 13 b3 ♗b7 with good pressure against White's centre) 12...♗xb2 13 ♗xf8 ♗xa1 14 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 15 ♖xa1 ♘b6 16 d4 ♕f6 and now in L.Breivik-S.Grigoriants, Linares 2003, 17 ♘f4 would have left the position quite unclear.

9...a6 10 ♗e3 b5

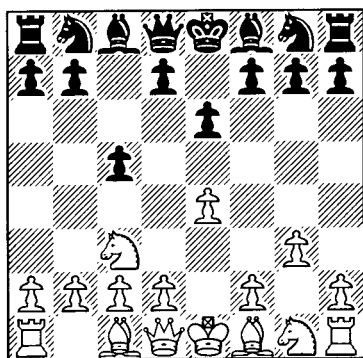
As White's play has been a little unambitious so far, Black might also consider claiming further space with 10...e5!? after which, for example, 11 ♔h2 b5 12 axb5 axb5 13 ♕d2 b4 14 ♘d1 ♗b7 15 ♗h6 ♕c7 16 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 17 ♘e3 ♘e7 18 ♘h4! ♘fg8! 19 f4 f6 remained about even in M.Narciso Dublan-C.Bauer, Bilbao 2004.

11 axb5 axb5 12 ♕d2

White can also change the nature of the struggle with 12 e5!?. Here 12...dxe5!? 13 ♗xc5 b4 is actually far from clear since Black has good squares for his knights on both d4 and d5, but in A.Kogan-B.Avrukh, online blitz 2000, he preferred to play it safe: 12...♘e8 13 exd6 exd6 14 ♕d2 b4 15 ♘d5?! ♗xb2 16 ♗g5 f6 17 ♗h6 ♗xa1 18 ♗xf8 ♔xf8 19 ♕h6+ ♔g8 20 ♖xa1 ♗e6 and White didn't have enough for his pawn.

12...b4

Both sides have proceeded quite

logically thus far and the position is roughly equal. L.Kritz-E.Alekseev, Biel 2005 (a predecessor to their encounter discussed in the main line of A3), continued 13 ♘e2 ♗b7 14 ♘h4 ♕c7 15 ♗h6 ♖a8 (15...♗xh6 16 ♕xh6 b3!? would have been a more ambitious try) 16 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 17 ♕g5 ♖xa1 18 ♖xa1 e6 with approximate equality.

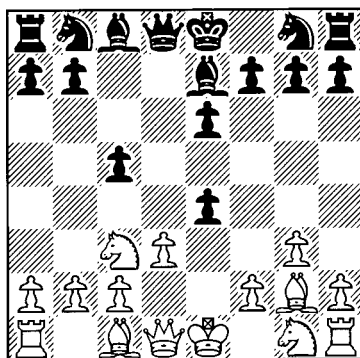
B)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 e6 3 g3

3...d5

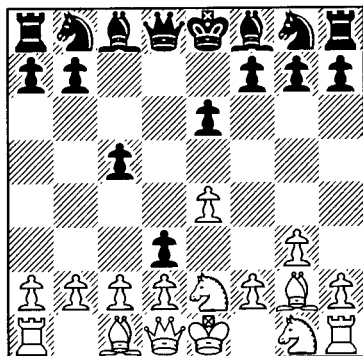
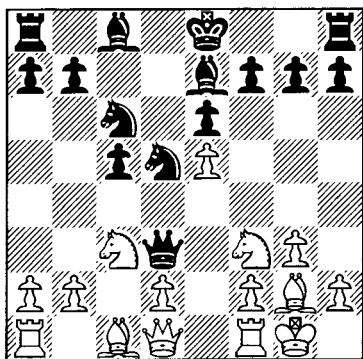
Taking over the centre and this logical advance is considered by many grandmasters to be an easy equalizer. Indeed some Closed Sicilian players try to move order Black away from this variation by preferring a 3 ♘ge2 move order, as we'll discuss in Chapter Five. Those ...e6 players seeking something more dynamic should consider 3...a6!? when 4 ♗g2 (4 ♘f3 was discussed in Line D of Chapter Two and 4 ♘ge2 b5 5 ♗g2 ♗b7 can be found in Line C of that chapter) 4...b5 5 d3 (5 e5 is White's only independent option, but after 5...♘c6 he doesn't really want to part with his powerful bishop; instead 6 d3 ♗b7 7 f4 ♘h6! 8 ♘e4 ♘f5 9 c3 d6 10 exd6 ♗xd6 11 ♘f3 0-0 12 0-0 ♕c7 was equal in P.Lerch-N.Sulava, Cannes 1996) 5...♗b7 transposes to Line A of Chapter Two.

4 exd5

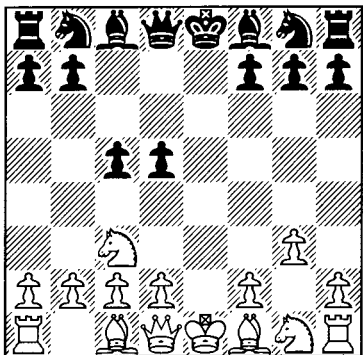
This remains White's main move, but those Grandmasters still employing the Closed are nowadays just as likely to avoid this exchange, trying to guide play more into a King's Indian Attack-type position. There are two ways of doing that:

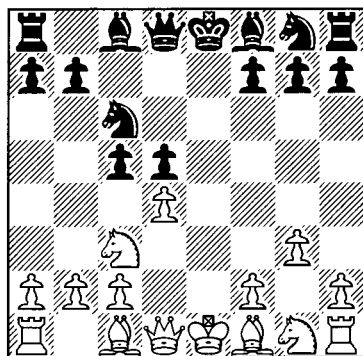
a) 4 d3 can be met by 4...♘c6 5 ♗g2 (5 exd5 exd5 6 ♗g2 returns to the main line) 5...♘f6 6 e5 ♘d7 7 f4 ♗e7 with a complex closed centre position. Some readers may like such positions, but others won't and so we will concentrate on a solid but much less common alternative, namely 4...♗e7!?. Play usually continues 5 ♗g2 (alternatively, 5 exd5 exd5 6 ♗g2 ♘f6 is another route to the main line and 5 e5 is now a little premature since after 5...♘c6 6 f4 Black can develop comfortably with 6...♘h6; ...♘f5 and ...h5 is one good follow-up, another being ...0-0 and ...f6) 5...dxe4 and now:

a1) 6 dxe4 ♕xd1+ 7 ♘xd1 looks like it might offer White a small edge, but is well neutralized by 7...♗d7!, preparing to contest the long diagonal and leaving Black very solidly placed. R.Slobodjan-V.Epishin, Baden-Baden 2002, continued 8 ♘e3 (heading for c4; 8 ♘c3 gives the knight fewer options and allows Black to consider 8...♘c6 and ...♘d4 before ...♗c6) 8...♗c6 9 ♘e2 ♘d7 10 ♗d2 ♘gf6 11 f3 0-0 (Nora Medvegy's 11...b5!? followed by ...♘b6 is a dynamic alternative) 12 ♘c4 ♗b5 13 ♘a3 ♗c6 and objectively White had nothing better than to repeat moves.

a2) 6 ♘xe4 ♘f6 7 ♘e2 ♘xe4 8 ♗xe4 ♘d7 9 0-0 ♘f6 10 ♗g2 0-0 is a sequence which has occurred a few times. White's fianchettoed bishop is a strong piece, but it is not so easy for him to find good roles for his other minor pieces. Black, for his part, is once again very solid and shouldn't have any problems if he brings his bishop to c6: 11 ♘c3 (11 d4!? is perhaps more challenging, but 11...cxd4 12 ♘xd4 e5 13 ♘b3 ♕c7 14 c3?! ♗e6 gave Black an edge due to his forthcoming minority attack in M.Kolesar-P.David, Brno 1990; here White might prefer 12 ♕xd4, although after 12...♕xd4 13 ♘xd4 ♖d8 14 ♘b5 ♗d7 15 ♘c3 ♗c6! Black is fine with both ...♘d5 and ...♗b4 useful resources) 11...♕b6! 12 ♕e2 ♗d7 13 b3 ♗c6 14 ♗xc6 ♕xc6 15 ♗b2 ♖fd8 was, for example, quite comfortable for Black in E.Keogh-Y.Rochev, Bunratty 2007.

b) 4 ♗g2 is less common nowadays than our last variation, but did receive some attention from Romanishin in the early Eighties. Just as in variation 'a', Black has a specific and promising response, namely 4...d4 5 ♘ce2 (5 ♘b1 has also been tried when Black might be happy to play a reversed King's Indian after 5...e5 or he can continue to head for independent waters with 5...d3!? 6 cxd3 ♘c6) 5...d3!?

6 cxd3 ♘c6 when White has some problems to solve over the d3-square (7 ♘f4 g5 followed by ...♘b4 is why White cannot maintain the pawn). Play can continue 7 ♘f3 (or 7 d4 cxd4 8 d3 when White has his reversed King's Indian-type position, but the open c-file will give Black counterplay after developing his kingside and he can also play more ambitiously with the 8...♕a5+!? 9 ♗d2 ♕b5 of M.Narmontas-S.Cicak, Warsaw (rapid) 2006) 7...♕xd3 8 0-0 ♘f6 9 e5 (preventing Black from clamping down on the d-file with ...e5; instead 9 ♘f4?! ♕xe4 10 ♖e1 ♕b4 11 a3 ♕b6 12 b4 cxb4 13 d4 ♗e7 14 d5 exd5 15 ♗e3 ♕d8 was a spirited try, but failed to give White enough compensation in B.Roselli Mailhe-J.Cubas, Vicente Lopez 2003) 9...♘d5 10 ♘c3 ♗e7

11 ♘e1 (or 11 ♖e1 0-0 12 ♘e4 ♘d4! 13 ♘xd4 ♕xd4 14 d3 ♕xe5 15 ♘xc5 ♕c7 and the weakness of d3 gave Black the edge in G.Canfell-I.Bjelobrk, Auckland 2005) 11...♘xc3 12 bxc3 ♕d7 13 f4 b6 and this complex position was roughly level in F.Verduyn-K.Schulz, Belgian League 2002; Black has easy play on the queenside and down the d-file, but White's extra space gives him chances for some kingside counterplay.

Returning to the main line with 4 exd5:

4...exd5

5 ♗g2

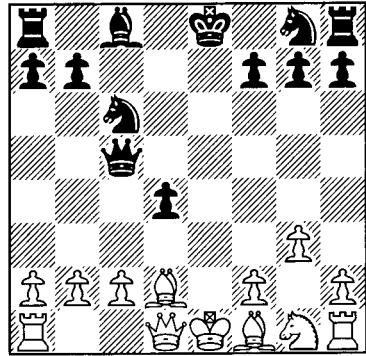
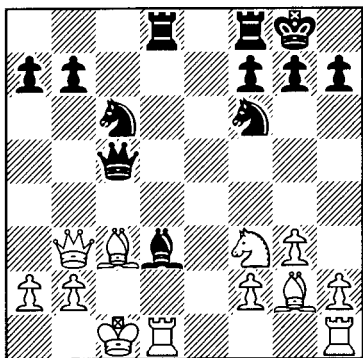
White's most popular move. Our main line can also occur via 5 d3 ♘f6 6 ♗g2 ♗e7, but White has a more dynamic alternative in 5 d4!?. This is, though, also quite risky and depending on his knowledge of the Open Games, Black can now transpose with 5...cxd4 6 ♕xd4 ♘f6 to a reversed Goring Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 exd4 4 c3 d5 5 exd5 ♕xd5) in which White has gained the extra move g3. That is quite playable for Black, but I also like to quickly attack d4 with 5...♘c6!? and now:

a) 6 ♘ge2?! ♗g4! snares White in a nasty trap: it's not possible to prevent both 7...♘xd4 and 7...♗f3.

b) 6 ♗g2 ♘xd4 (6...cxd4!? 7 ♘xd5 ♘ge7 looks like a good alternative, relying on the cramping influence of the d4-pawn and meeting 8 ♕e2 with 8...♗f5) 7 ♘xd5?! (White should prefer 7 ♗e3 ♗e6 8 ♗xd4 cxd4 9 ♕xd4 ♘f6 which is far from clear; Black's bishop-pair and especially his active dark-squared bishop after ...♕a5 and ...♗c5 or ...♗b4 compensate for the IQP) 7...♗f5 8 ♘e3 ♕e7! 9 ♘e2 0-0-0 10 ♗d2 ♗e4 gave Black the initiative and excellent play on the light squares in

P.Corriveau-S.Lacroix, Montreal 2004.

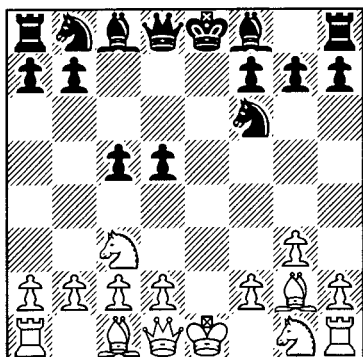
c) 6 ♕e2+?! ♗e7 7 dxc5 ♘f6 8 ♗e3 0-0 9 0-0-0 is extremely rare, but quite critical in that White wants to retain the extra pawn. However, White appears to be risking more than he gains since his pieces are very vulnerable to both ...d4 and ...♗g4 with 9...d4 (9...♖e8!? is also extremely tempting, meeting 10 ♕b5?! with 10...d4 11 ♘ge2 ♗d7 and Black is also better after 10 ♗g2 ♗g4 11 ♗f3 ♗xf3 12 ♕xf3 d4 13 ♗g5 ♘d7!) 10 ♗g2?! (already White must be extremely careful; 10 ♘f3!? might improve, although 10...♗xc5 11 ♗xd4 ♘xd4 12 ♘xd4 ♗g4! 13 f3 ♗xd4 14 fxg4 ♕b6 obviously gives Black excellent play for the pawn) 10...♗g4 11 f3 (this doesn't convince, but White also loses material after 11 ♘f3 ♗xc5 12 ♕c4 ♗xf3 13 ♗xf3 ♕a5) 11...♗e6 12 ♗g5 ♕a5 working out rather well for Black in J.Niksic-G.Basanta, Winnipeg 1994.

d) 6 ♗e3!? intends to give up the bishop-pair for play against an IQP, but is well met by 6...cxd4 7 ♗xd4 ♘ge7! when Black gains sufficient counterplay. This was demonstrated in H.Jurkovic-D.Sermek, Pula 1999, which continued 8 ♗g2 ♘f5 9 ♘ge2 ♗e6 10 0-0 ♗e7 11 ♗e3 ♘xe3 12 fxe3 ♕b6 13 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 14 ♕xd5 ♕xe3+ with full equality and was shortly agreed drawn.

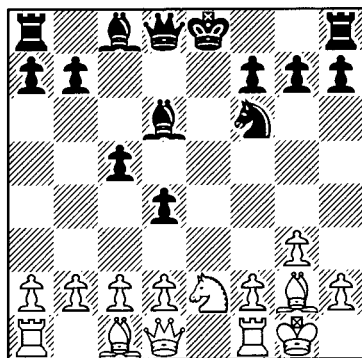
e) 6 dxc5 d4 7 ♘e4 (7 ♕e2+ ♗e6 8 ♘e4 ♗xc5 is similar; Black's rapid development offsets the IQP) 7...♗xc5 8 ♘xc5 (the more restrained 8 ♗g2 might be better, although Black was still quite comfortable after 8...♗e7 9 ♘e2 ♘f6 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♘f4 ♗f5 12 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 13 ♘d5 ♗e5 in T.Gabrielsen-T.Wyss, Logumkloster 1994) 8...♕a5+ 9 ♗d2 ♕xc5 can be considered the main continuation after 5...♘c6, even though Black's easy development, extra space and pressure against the white queenside gives him an active and good game.

Indeed in practice White has often struggled to show up the IQP as a weakness: for example, 10 ♗g2 (10 ♕e2+ ♗e6 11 ♕b5 ♕xb5 12 ♗xb5 ♗d5 13 f3 ♘f6 also gave Black plenty of activity in J.Appendino-Z.Bratanov, Paris 2002) 10...♗f5 11 c3?! (alternatively, 11 ♕e2+? ♔d7! 12 ♕f3 ♘f6 13 ♕b3 ♖ae8+ 14 ♘e2 ♔c8 was something of a disaster for White in B.Bauerndistel-B.Langhein, correspondence 1982, but 11 ♖c1 ♘b4 12 ♗xb4 ♕xb4+ 13 c3 should maintain equality) 11...♘f6 12 ♘f3 (K.Kokolias-H.Banikas, Ikaros 2003) 12...dxc3! 13 ♗xc3 ♖d8 14 ♕b3 (or 14 ♕e2+ ♔f8 15 ♗xf6 gxf6 forcing White into a speculative exchange sacrifice with 16 0-0 ♗d3) 14...♗d3!? (Black can also play more slowly with 14...♕e7+ 15 ♔f1 0-0) 15 0-0-0 0-0

16 ♖he1 b5 and White is struggling.

Returning to the more prudent 5 ♗g2:

5...♘f6

We will concentrate on a solid system for Black in which he prioritizes kingside development, but in any case Black is advised to avoid 5...d4 since 6 ♕e2+! is a little awkward.

6 d3

The best way of developing the queen's bishop since 6 d4 is now rather risky for White. Following 6...cxd4 7 ♕xd4 ♘c6 Black has an promising IQP position and has scored quite well in practice; for example, 8 ♕a4 (alternatively, 8 ♕d1 d4 9 ♘ce2 ♗c5 10 ♘f3 ♗f5 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♘f4 ♖e8 13 ♘d3 ♗b6 gave Black the edge due to his extra space in D.Suttles-M.Tal, Hastings 1973/74, but 8 ♕d3?! d4 9 ♘e4 ♗f5 10 ♗g5 ♗xe4 11 ♗xe4 ♕a5+ 12 ♗d2 ♕e5 was even worse for White in C.Leite-M.Suba, Campillos 2007) 8...d4 9 ♘ce2 ♗d7 leaves White's queen a little misplaced and 10 c3?! ♗c5 11 ♕c4? ♘e5! 12 ♕b3 dxc3 saw him quickly routed in P.Mauron-A.Groszpeter, Lenk 2000.

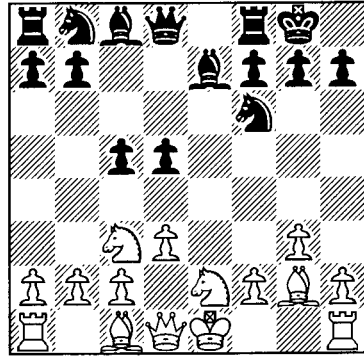
A more important alternative to the text is 6 ♘ge2, although White rarely plays this way any more. The reason being that nowadays he prefers to be able to recapture with d3xe4 in the event of a ...d4; ♘e4 ♘xe4 exchange. Here that is clearly impossible and 6...d4 (with White threatening to go d4 himself, since that is now supported by a knight, Black is best advised to advance his d-pawn; it's only after 6 d3 that holding back on ...d4 is a good policy) 7 ♘e4 ♘xe4 8 ♗xe4 ♘d7 9 0-0 (9 d3 merely transposes after 9...♘f6 10 ♗g2 ♗d6 11 0-0) 9...♘f6 10 ♗g2 ♗d6 has long been considered quite comfortable.

Indeed if anyone must be careful here it's White due to Black's long-term spatial advantage; a fact realized ever since B.Spassky-V.Korchnoi, 5th matchgame, Kiev 1968: 11 d3 (11 c3 is the alternative when Kasparov has opted for the forcing 11...d3!? 12 ♘f4 0-0 13 ♘xd3 ♗xg3 14 fxg3 ♕xd3; simpler and also equal is 11...0-0 12 cxd4 cxd4 13 d3 ♖e8 14 ♘f4 ♕b6, W.Hug-Z.Ribli, Lucerne Olympiad 1982) 11...0-0 12 ♗f4 (Tal's suggestion of 12 h3 might be a better try, although Black was quite comfortable after 12...♗e6 13 ♘f4 ♗xf4 14 ♗xf4 ♕d7 15 ♔h2 ♗d5! in V.Krapivin-A.Shariyazdanov, Pskov 1998) 12...♗g4! 13 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 14 h3 ♗d7 15 ♘f4 ♖fe8 16 ♕d2 ♗c6 17 ♖ae1 ♘d7 and the black position remained the easier to improve.

6...♗e7

A more popular alternative, especially in recent years, is 6...d4 when 7 ♘e4 ♘xe4 8 ♗xe4 (8 dxe4!? is a more unbalanced alternative) 8...♘d7 is pretty even. The text isn't, though, at all inferior and may be less well known to some white players, although in either case Black must be prepared for a long grind should he be aiming for the full point in the rather stodgy positions which commonly arise.

7 ♘ge2

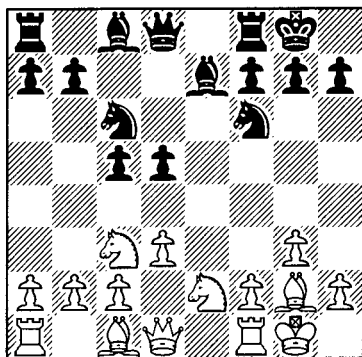
Should White want to pressurize d5, he might begin with 7 ♗g5, although after 7...0-0 he hasn't anything better than 8 ♘ge2 transposing to the next note, since 8 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 9 ♘xd5 allows 9...♗xb2.

7...0-0

8 0-0

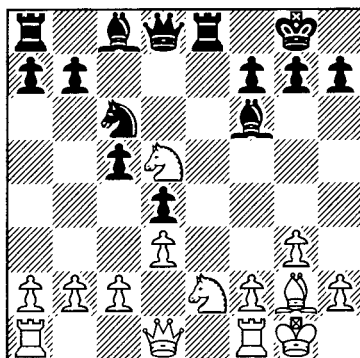
An important alternative is 8 ♗g5 d4 9 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 10 ♘e4 (White can also aim to transpose to variation 'c' in the notes to Black's 8th, below, with 10 ♘d5 ♘c6 11 0-0, but Black can remain in independent waters with 10...♗e5: 11 0-0 ♘d7 12 ♘ef4 ♗xf4 was equal and agreed drawn in A.Weiss-A.Suetin, Schwaebisch Gmuend 1995, and Black can also consider Jakobsen's 11...g6!?) 10...♗e7 11 0-0 ♘c6 12 ♘f4, but practice has also shown this position to be about equal. Possibly the easiest course for Black is 12...♗f5 (12...♖e8 is also fine after which 13 ♕h5!? g6 14 ♕d5 ♗f5 15 ♖fe1 ♔g7 16 a3 ♖c8 17 h3 ♕xd5 18 ♘xd5 ♗f8 maintained the balance in R.Fischer-B.Spassky, 23rd matchgame, Belgrade 1992) 13 ♘d5 ♖c8!?, provoking exchanges and hoping for good counterplay against c2 after 14 ♘xe7+ (White might prefer 14 ♕f3, but then 14...♗e6 15 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7 16 ♕f4 ♘b4 doesn't give him anything and neither did 14 ♖e1 ♗d6 15 ♕d2 b6 16 ♖e2?! ♗b8! 17 h3 ♔h8 18 ♘f4 ♘e5 in A.Soltis-H.Olafsson, New York 1986) 14...♕xe7 15 ♕h5 ♗g6!? 16

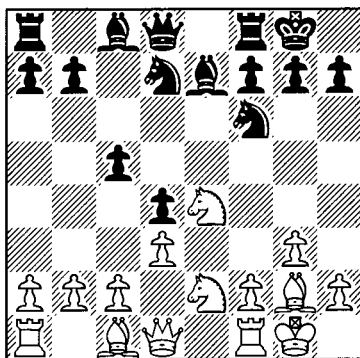
♕xc5 ♕xc5 17 ♘xc5 ♘b4.

8...d4!?

Quite a rare move order, but this looks like an easy equalizer. Nevertheless, there is nothing wrong with the more common 8...♘c6 and now:

a) 9 ♘f4 is fairly well met by 9...♗g4! 10 f3 ♗c8, blunting White's fianchettoed bishop; for example, 11 a3 h6 12 h4?! ♗d6 13 ♘ce2 d4! 14 c4 a5 15 ♘h3 ♖e8 left the white kingside and especially the e3-square a little tender in N.Mariano-V.Ivanisevic, Cannes 2006.

b) 9 d4 cxd4 10 ♘xd4 ♗g4 gives Black good activity to counterbalance the IQP with 11 ♕d3 ♘b4 12 ♕d2 ♕d7 13 b3 ♖ac8 14 ♗b2 ♘c6 15 ♘xc6 bxc6 16 ♘e2 ♘e4! remaining quite unbalanced and unclear in J.Houska-M.Solleveld, Copenhagen 2003.

c) 9 ♗g5 finally forces 9...d4, but after 10 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 11 ♘d5 (or 11 ♘e4, transposing back to the notes to White's 8th move) 11...♖e8 White's control of d5 doesn't bring him any advantage against the solid black position.

E.Deutsch-V.Golod, Israeli Team Championship 2004, continued 12 ♘xf6+ (previously 12 ♘ef4 ♗e5 13 ♖e1 ♕d6 14 ♕f3 ♗d7 had been agreed drawn in V.Hort-M.Bobotsov, Palma de Mallorca 1969; it's not easy for either side to undertake much, although Black can always exchange pieces with ...♘e7 and later ...♗c6) 12...♕xf6 13 ♘f4 ♗d7 14 ♕d2 ♕d6 15 ♖fe1 b6 16 a3 h6 and now Golod believes that 17 b4, not fearing 17...g5!?, would have retained rough equality, whereas 17 h4 ♖ac8 18 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 19 ♖e1 ♘e5! saw Black beginning to gain the initiative in the game.

9 ♘e4 ♘bd7!

Preparing to recapture with the knight on f6 and thereby maintain control of d5.

10 ♘xf6+

In this variation White would like to exchange a pair of knights and place his remaining knight on d5, but in this position it is not at all easy for him to do so. The text is a straightforward attempt to carry out that plan, but quite possibly White should prefer one of the alternatives:

a) 10 c3 dxc3 11 bxc3 unbalances the structure, after which 11...♘e5!? 12 d4 cxd4 13 cxd4!? (or 13 ♘xd4 ♕c7 14 ♕b3 ♖d8 with a complex and roughly even position) 13...♘c4 14 ♕a4 ♘xe4 15 ♗xe4 ♘d6 16 ♗g2 ♗d7 reached an unclear and unusual type of IQP position in B.Kuehn-T.Kohler, Spree 1997.

b) 10 b4 is another interesting idea which Black especially won't mind seeing if he is playing for the win.

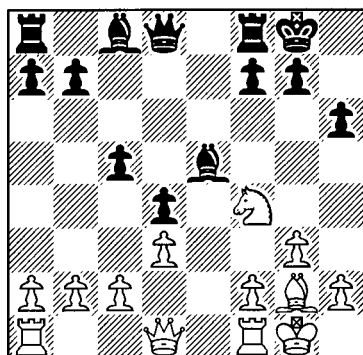
A.Karlovich-R.Pokorna, Tallinn 1997, continued 10...♘xe4 11 dxe4 ♘e5 12 bxc5 ♗xc5 13 ♗b2 ♘c6 (13...♗g4!? is a good alternative, intending 14 h3 ♗f3 15 ♗xf3 ♘xf3+ 16 ♔g2 ♘g5 when Black either defends d4 or picks up e4 in return) 14 ♘f4 ♕d6 and was quite unclear; Black's strong d4-point and option of ...f5 offset White's control of d5.

c) 10 ♘f4

has been White's most popular approach, but 10...♖b8!? (10...♖e8 is a solid alternative, intending ...♘e5 and ...♗g4) 11 ♘xf6+ ♘xf6 12 ♘h5 ♘xh5 13 ♕xh5 b5 is nothing to be worried about.

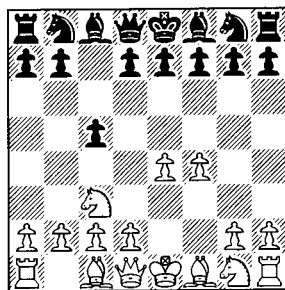
White can't easily create anything on the kingside and 14 ♗f4 (or 14 ♗e4 f5 15 ♗f4 when there's nothing wrong with Lane's solid 15...♗d6, but Black can also consider giving up the ex-

change for the light squares with 15...fxe4!? 16 ♗xb8 ♗f5) 14...♖b6 15 ♖fe1 g6 16 ♕e2 ♖e8 17 ♕d2 ♖e6 18 ♖xe6 ♗xe6 was fine for Black in S.Glinert-D.Raheb, Winnipeg 2002.

10...♘xf6 11 ♗g5 h6 12 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 13 ♘f4 ♗e5!

White has gained control of d5 at the cost of the bishop-pair, but unfortunately for him 14 ♘d5 ♗e6 15 ♕f3 ♖e8 doesn't supply any advantage: Black can ignore the knight for the time being and regroup with ...♕d6 and ...♖ad8 or even ...♗d7-c6. However, White should prefer to play this equal position rather than 14 ♕f3 ♕d6 15 ♖fe1 ♖d8 16 ♕e4?! ♗xf4 17 ♕xf4 ♕xf4 18 gxf4 ♖b8 19 ♖e5 b6 20 ♖ae1 ♗d7 which saw him slowly ground down due to his inferior structure in A.Marechal-V.Bologan, Rethymnon 2003.

2...e6 3 g3 d5 has long had a good reputation among grandmasters and deserves to be more popular at club level. 5 d4 is no more than an interesting double-edged try, while our main line permits Black a reasonable choice between two solid and quite comfortable options.

Chapter Four

The Grand Prix Attack

1 e4 c5

The aggressive Grand Prix Attack remains a popular weapon and comes about via two different move orders:

A: 2 ♘c3 and 3 f4
B: 2 f4

The former is now by some distance the more popular choice since the latter has never really recovered from being hit by the powerful gambit 2...d5 3 exd5 ♘f6 (see Line B1).

A)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3

We will now consider the Grand Prix in relation to both 2...♘c6 and 2...e6 (2...a6 3 f4 was Line B of Chapter Two). Thus we have:

A1: 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 f4
A2: 2 ♘c3 e6 3 f4

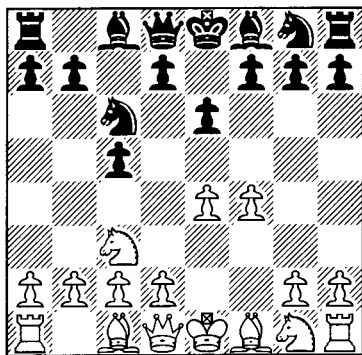
A1)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 f4 e6

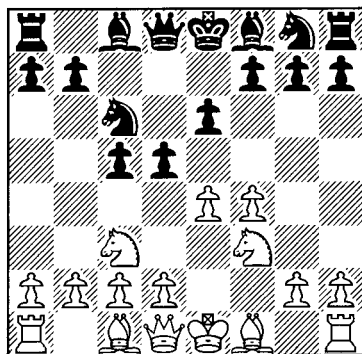
I imagine that this might well come as a surprise to some readers. Previous works have tended to advocate 3...g6, a move which is nowadays nothing less than the main line of the Grand Prix Attack. That is in itself a good reason for preferring something different. White players generally not only face 3...g6 much more than 3...e6, but are also much better prepared for it: for example, *NCO* focuses on the former with the latter surprisingly going unmentioned, while the recent white repertoire, *Chess Openings for White, Explained,* devotes 20 of its 38 pages of Grand Prix coverage to 3...g6 as opposed to just four for 3...e6.

Of course, there would be no point in recommending the text if it was inferior to 3...g6, but I believe that the main line position arising after 4 ♘f3 d5 5 ♗b5 ♘ge7 most certainly isn't. Indeed only taste, and perhaps a desire to get

away from defending against the popular 3...g6 4 ♘f3 ♗g7 5 ♗b5 ♘d4 6 0-0, will dictate whether or not the reader wishes to adopt this particular variation. It does lead to some quite challenging and unbalanced positions (no lesser players than Shirov and Topalov have been happy to handle the black side), while the theory of it is less worked out than that of 3...g6.

4 ♘f3

By far White's most popular move. Instead 4 ♗c4?! simply invites Black to carry out his intended central advance and after 4...♘ge7 5 ♘f3 d5 6 ♗b5 White has lost an important tempo. We should also note that 4 g3 is pretty rare since after 4...d5 White doesn't want to exchange on d5: his inability to use the f4-square gives him an inferior version of Line B of our last chapter. Of course, White can prefer either 5 e5 or 5 d3 which should be compared with, and may well transpose to, variations 'b' and 'c' respectively of the notes to White's 5th, below.

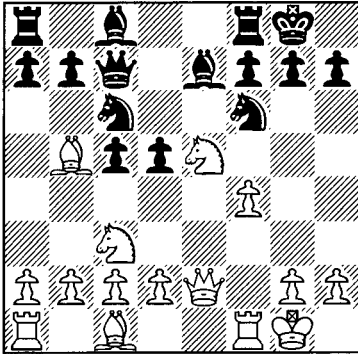
4...d5

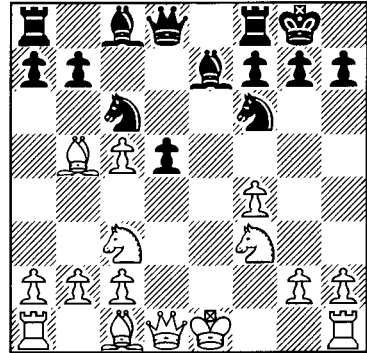
Fighting for control of the centre in French style, but an alternative which Taimanov players should explore is 4...a6. White often then transposes to their favourite defence with 5 d4; his other main option being 5 g3 when 5...d5 6 d3 ♘f6 (by no means forced) 7 e5 ♘d7 8 ♗g2 ♗e7 9 0-0 0-0 reaches an unbalanced position which can arise from a number of move orders.

5 ♗b5

The main line, but occasionally White prefers something different:

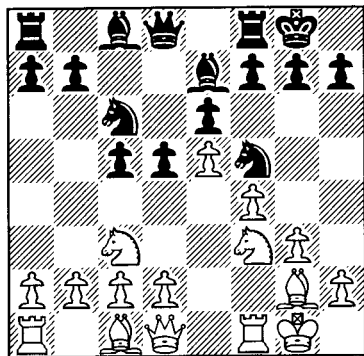
a) 5 exd5 exd5 with a further divide:

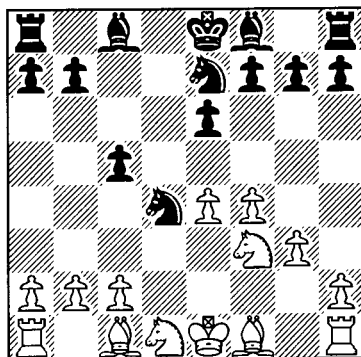
a1) 6 ♗b5 ♘e7 transposes to Line B13. Black can also take advantage of White's slightly premature exchange to prefer the more active 6...♘f6, focusing on the weakened e4- and g4-squares. B.Staufenberger-S.Dvoirys, Bad Wiessee 2002, continued 7 ♘e5 (7 0-0 ♗e7 8 ♘e5 ♗d7 9 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 10 ♗xc6 ♕xc6 11 ♕f3 0-0 12 d3 ♖fe8 was also rather comfortable for Black in Z.Mestrovic-G.Dizdar, Solin 1993; here it might be more consistent for White to prefer 9 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 10 ♘xc6 bxc6 11 d3 0-0, but then Black will gain sufficient counterplay for the doubled pawns with either

...♕b6 and ...c4+ or ...d4 and ...♘d5) 7...♕c7 8 ♕e2 ♗e7 9 0-0 0-0

10 ♗xc6 bxc6 11 b3 (Black also stood well after 11 d3 ♗d6 12 ♕f2 ♖e8 13 ♗d2 d4! 14 ♘a4 ♗a6 15 b3 ♗b5 in U.Norevall-E.Sveshnikov, Gausdal 1992; White can only keep e5 covered through tactical means for so long) 11...♗d6 12 ♗a3 ♖e8 when it was clear that the opening of the e-file only really helped Black (after 5 ♗b5 ♘f6 White rarely hurries to capture on d5), and following 13 ♕f3 ♕a5 14 ♗b2 ♗a6!? 15 ♖fe1 d4 the Russian grandmaster had taken over the initiative.

a2) 5 exd5 exd5 6 d4 heads for an IQP position, but White would rather his f-pawn was still on f2 in such a scenario: not only is his dark-squared bishop blunted, but the e4-square is a long-term weakness. Thus White needs to play quite creatively in this structure to avoid drifting into a bad position. 'Hent'-A.Kogan, online Freestyle 2006, continued 6...♘f6 7 ♗b5 (Tarrasch once preferred 7 ♗e3, but after 7...cxd4 8 ♘xd4 ♗b4 9 ♗b5 ♗d7 10 0-0 0-0 Black, who was already focusing on the e4-square, clearly hadn't any problems in F.Grafl-H.Hoffmann, German League 2006) 7...♗e7 8 dxc5 and now Kogan's 8...♗xc5 allowed White to reach a complex queenless middlegame after 9 ♕e2+! ♕e7 10 ♕xe7+ ♔xe7. Black can also play more dynamically with 8...0-0!?

9 ♗e3 (holding on to c5 is the only critical try) 9...♘g4! 10 ♗d4 (or 10 ♗g1 ♗f6 11 h3 ♗xc3+ 12 bxc3 ♖e8+ 13 ♔f1 ♘f6 followed by occupying e4) 10...♗h4+ 11 ♘xh4 ♕xh4+ 12 g3 ♖e8+ with good play for the pawn, not least due to White's weakened light squares.

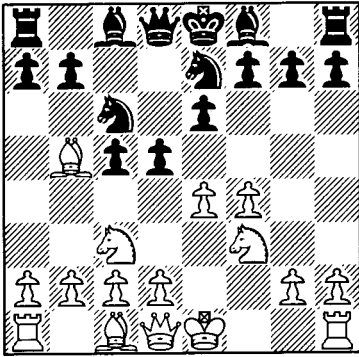
b) 5 e5 leads to a French-type position, but one in which White hasn't a pawn on d4 and may find himself a little short of a good plan. Following the logical 5...♘h6 6 g3 (sometimes White hopes to avoid becoming slightly cramped by trading off his light-squared bishop, but after 6 ♗b5 ♗d7 7 ♕e2 ♘f5 8 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 9 b3 ♕b6 10 ♗b2 c4! 11 g4 ♘d4 12 ♘xd4 ♕xd4 it was clear in A.Bujakevich-E.Sveshnikov, Moscow 1996, that Black enjoyed plenty of activity and most

certainly didn't have a bad light-squared bishop) 6...♘f5 7 ♗g2 (Black also shouldn't be worried by 7 ♗h3 since White doesn't really want to weaken his light squares with an exchange on f5; Black can either prevent a g4-advance with 7...g6 8 0-0 h5 or seize some useful space with the 7...d4!? 8 ♘e4 b6 9 0-0 ♗b7 of W.Wandl-W.Schmidt, Dortmund 1990) 7...♗e7 (7...h5!? is an obvious and good alternative after which 8 d3 b6 9 ♘e2 ♗b7 10 c3 d4! saw Black making good use of her strongly-placed f5-knight in A.Skripchenko-A.Galliamova, New Delhi 2000) 8 0-0 0-0

9 d3 f6! (correctly undermining White's centre in the manner of the French) 10 ♖e1 ♘fd4 11 exf6 ♗xf6 12 ♗d2 ♕d6 13 ♖b1 ♗d7 Black was quite comfortable and White a touch passive in K.Fahrner-F.Volkmann, Austrian League 1996.

c) 5 d3 unsurprisingly gives Black a number of options. He might opt to close the centre with 5...♘f6 6 e5 ♘d7 or can continue flexibly with 5...♘ge7. Following 6 g3 one reasonable idea is 6...g6, 7...♗g7 and 8...0-0, a set-up which Black often employs against the King's Indian Attack (with White's pawn back on f2). Another is 6...dxe4 when 7 ♘xe4 ♘f5 is quite comfortable for Black (compare with the note to White's 6th move in Line A2 to which play may transpose), while 7 dxe4 ♕xd1+ (in light of what follows, Black might also consider the untried 7...♘d4!?; play might well continue with the forcing 8 ♗e3 ♘ec6 9 ♗b5 ♗d7! 10 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 11 ♗xd4 cxd4 12 ♕xd4 when White has won a pawn, but Black gains sufficient compensation and after 12...♗xb5 13 ♕xd8+ ♖xd8 14 ♘xb5 a6 15 ♘c3 ♗b4 16 ♖d1 ♗xc3+ 17 bxc3 ♖c8! 18 ♖d3 ♖c4 isn't worse in the double rook ending) 8 ♘xd1 (8 ♔xd1!? is quite possibly more critical since the threat of ♘b5 is not so easy to prevent; following 8...e5! 9 h3 ♗d7 10 ♗d2! a6 11 ♘d5 0-0-0 the position is rather unclear and in need of a test) 8...♘d4! (otherwise Black has a few problems with his kingside development)

9 ♘xd4 cxd4 10 ♘f2 ♗d7 11 ♗d2

♘c6 12 ♘d3 f6 13 e5!? ♗e7 14 0-0-0 ♖c8 15 ♖e1 ♔f7 saw a complex but roughly balanced manoeuvring struggle underway in N.Stanec-N.Sommerbauer, Gmunden 2005.

Returning to 5 ♗b5:

5...♘ge7

Black wisely gives himself the option of recapturing with a piece on c6. It should be noted, however, that depending on when White makes any exchange on c6, it may be better and/or more dynamic to take back with the b-pawn. We will now chiefly focus on:

A11: 6 0-0
A12: 6 ♘e5
A13: 6 ♕e2
A14: 6 exd5

White has also tried:

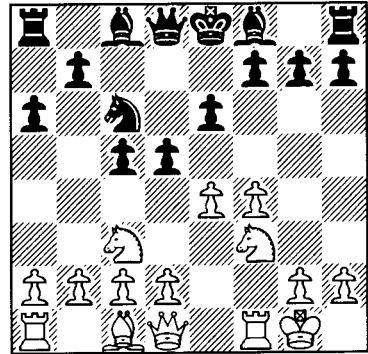
a) 6 d3 is likely to transpose to Line A11 after 6...a6 7 ♗xc6+ ♘xc6 8 0-0.

b) 6 e5 is an advance which generally fails to impress in the Grand Prix. Here Black has a number of reasonable options, including 6...♗d7 7 0-0 ♘f5 8 d3 ♗e7 followed by ...0-0 and ...f6.

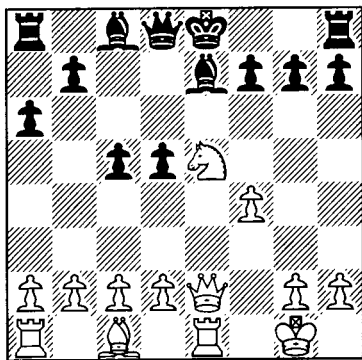
A11)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 f4 e6 4 ♘f3 d5 5 ♗b5 ♘ge7 6 0-0

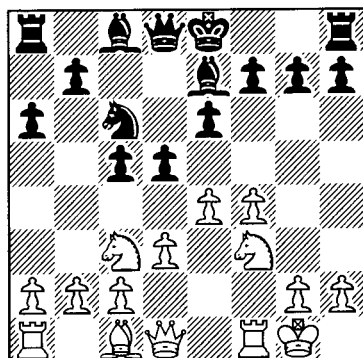
This may well be a little too routine since Black now gets to reveal the main idea behind his 5th.

6...a6 7 ♗xc6+ ♘xc6

8 d3

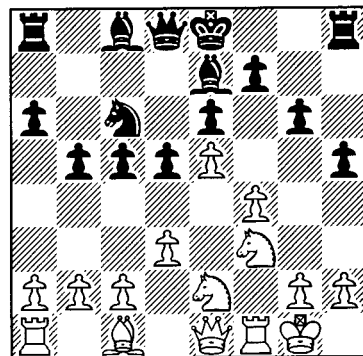
White hopes to keep the centre at least semi-closed, thereby allowing him to begin a kingside attack to offset Black's long-term advantage of the bishop-pair. Such a plan should not particularly scare the second player, but neither should 8 exd5 exd5 9 ♖e1+ (or 9 d4 cxd4 10 ♘xd4 ♗e7 11 ♔h1 0-0 12 f5 ♖e8 13 ♘ce2 ♗f6 and once again the advance of the white f-pawn had chiefly served to assist Black's counterplay in J.Pareja Perez-D.Komljenovic, Ceuta 1995) 9...♗e7 10 ♘e5. This line isn't particularly critical, but both Black's options are quite instructive for revealing how he can put his bishop-pair to good use:

a) 10...♘d4!? 11 ♘e2 ♘xe2+ 12 ♕xe2

12...0-0 13 ♕f2?! (quite possibly White has nothing better than 13 ♘c6 bxc6 14 ♕xe7 ♕xe7 15 ♖xe7 ♗f5 16 d3 ♖fe8 17 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 18 ♗d2 reaching a drawn opposite-coloured bishop ending) 13...♗d6 14 d3 ♕c7 15 ♗d2 ♗e6 16 ♘f3 ♖ae8 (already it is clear that White's lacks any real compensation for Black's superior central control and bishop-pair) 17 ♔h1 ♔h8 18 ♕h4 f6! 19 ♕f2 d4 20 ♘g1 ♗d5 and Black went on to win after advancing her very mobile queenside pawns in T.Rubzova-L.Saulina, Sochi 1987.

b) 10...0-0 11 ♘xc6 (Black need not fear the 11 ♘xd5? ♗h4! 12 ♘xc6 of J.Pape-M.Wildi, German League 1995, since now 12...bxc6 13 ♘e3 ♗xe1 14 ♕xe1 ♕d4 leaves White with insufficient compensation for the exchange) 11...bxc6 12 b3?! ♗f6! (this is almost always a good square for Black's dark-squared bishop after an exchange on d5) 13 ♗b2 ♗d4+ 14 ♔h1 ♕h4 and White was already under some pressure from Black's active queen and bishops in J.Gal-L.Istvandi, Budapest 1995.

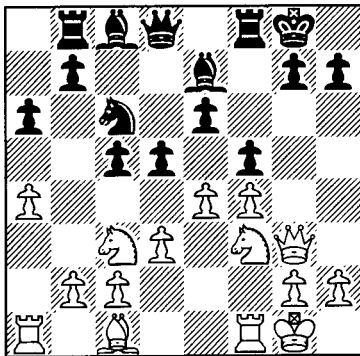
8...♗e7

9 ♕e1

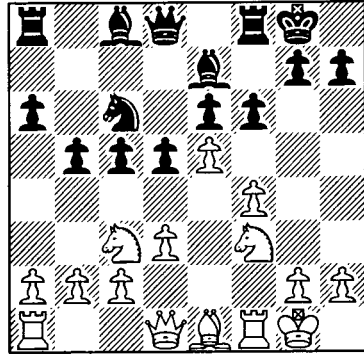
The most direct. White has tried a slew of alternatives, although he often lands up resorting to this queen manoeuvre at some stage:

a) 9 e5 b5 10 ♕e1 g6!? 11 ♘e2 h5! keeps White at bay on the kingside:

for example, 12 ♗d2 ♗b7 13 a3 a5 left Black well advanced on the queenside in D.Zahorsky-Y.Kruppa, Topolcianky 1994.

b) 9 ♔h1 hopes to avoid any possibility of ...♕b6 and ...c4+, but White might well regret this use of a tempo: 9...0-0 10 ♕e1 (a more independent try

is 10 ♘e5, but 10...♘d4! 11 ♗e3 f6 12 ♘g4 ♘c6 13 ♗g1 still saw Black gaining the upper hand in A.Moiseenko-A.Zubov, Alushta 1999, with 13...d4 now a good alternative to the game's also promising 13...f5; Black's leap into d4 is well worth remembering as a way of misplacing the white pieces) 10...b5 11 ♗d2 ♘d4! 12 ♖c1 (12 ♘xd4 cxd4 13 ♘e2 dxe4 14 dxe4 ♗b7 also leaves Black slightly better) 12...♗b7 13 ♕e3?! (one can understand White's desire to avoid 13 e5 b4 14 ♘e2 ♘xf3 15 ♖xf3 d4! followed by ...a5 and ...c4 when Black is quite fast on the queenside, but this was still probably a better try) 13...♘xf3 14 ♕xf3 b4 15 ♘b1 dxe4 16 dxe4 ♕d4 and the position had opened greatly to Black's advantage in R.Cardenas Valero-P.Cramling, Malaga 2000.

c) 9 a4 0-0 10 ♕e1 ♖b8 11 ♕g3 f5! reveals a typical way to halt White on the kingside

and after 12 ♕e1, as well as the 12...b5 of P.Erlbeck-J.Stocek, German League 1996, I also quite like 12...♘b4!? with the idea of 13 ♕e2 d4 14 ♘d1 fxe4 15 dxe4 d3.

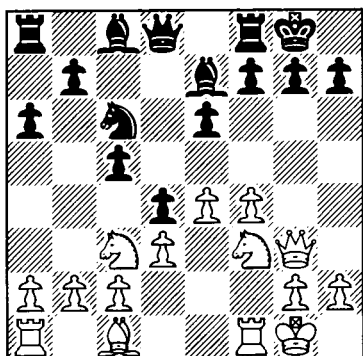
d) 9 ♗d2 0-0 10 ♗e1!? (something different at least and in a relatively more promising way than 10 ♕e1 b5 11 ♘d1?! ♗b7 12 ♘e3 dxe4 13 dxe4 ♘d4! 14 ♘xd4 ♕xd4 when Black's raking light-squared bishop gave her some advantage in J.Houska-A.Kosteniuk, Plovdiv 2003) 10...b5 11 e5 f6

12 ♗g3 (Black is also slightly for preference after 12 ♗h4 fxe5 13 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 14 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 15 fxe5 ♖xf1+ 16 ♕xf1 ♗b7; his light-squared bishop is far from bad with White unable to really get in d4 himself) 12...fxe5 13 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 14 fxe5 ♖xf1+ 15 ♕xf1 ♗b7 16 ♘e2 d4! and again Black was a little better in H.Kallio-I.Kanko, Finnish League 1998.

9...0-0 10 ♕g3

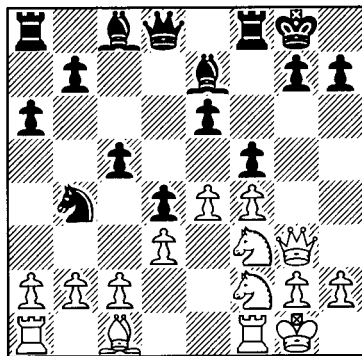
White has also tried to prevent Black from playing ...f5 with 10 f5?!, but this is rather unconvincing and 10...d4! (10...dxe4 11 dxe4 exf5 might also be possible, but at least gives White some pressure for his pawn after 12 ♕g3 ♖e8 13 ♗h6 g6 14 ♖ad1) 11 f6 ♗xf6 12 e5 ♘xe5 13 ♘xe5 dxc3 14 bxc3 ♗xe5 (14...b6!? is also quite promising

since 15 ♘c6 ♕d6 16 ♖xf6 ♕xc6 17 ♕h4!? ♗b7 18 ♖f3 e5 defends and leaves Black somewhat better) 15 ♕xe5 would have left White struggling in V.Nogrady-A.Parkanyi, Tapolca 1997, had Black rejected the panicky 15...♕d5?! in favour of the calm 15...b6 followed by ...f6.

10...d4!

Black seizes some useful space and forces White to lose some time with his knight before locking up the kingside with ...f5.

11 ♘d1

White has also tried 11 ♘e2 when 11...f5 (consistent, but 11...♘b4!? might be even stronger; 12 ♖b1 ♘xc2 13 ♗d2 ♘e3 is not what White was after, but his compensation is also lacking in the event of 12 f5! ♔h8! when he rather lacks a good follow-up, apart from the defensive 13 ♘e1 when 13...exf5 14 a3 ♘c6 15 exf5 ♖e8 is at least fine for Black since 16 ♕h3 is well met by 16...♕d5) 12 ♗d2 (or 12 exf5 exf5 13 ♗d2 ♗f6 14 ♘e5 and now in M.Sig Vargas-A.Lopez del Alamo, Gran Canaria 2002, 14...♕c7 15 ♖ae1 ♖e8 16 ♘c1 ♗e6 would have given Black a good game with the idea of either doubling on the e-file or advancing on the queenside after ...♗d5 and ...b5) 12...b5 13 ♔h1 ♗b7 14 ♕h3 ♕d7 15 ♘g3 g6 was pretty comfortable for Black in A.Matras-E.Kupczyk, Poraj 2003; White's only kingside option is ♘g5, but that knight can always then be traded off if needs be, whereas on the other hand White can only dream of exchanging his misplaced knight on g3.

11...f5 12 ♘f2 ♘b4

We've been following M.Lazic-S.Cvetkovic, Vrbas 1993, in which White had been halted on the kingside, leaving Black slightly for preference due to his bishop-pair and long-term queenside prospects. The game continued 13 ♘e1 and now Cvetkovic suggests 13...♕c7 14 a3 ♘c6 15 ♘f3 ♗d7 followed by ...♖ae8 when he feels that Black is a little better.

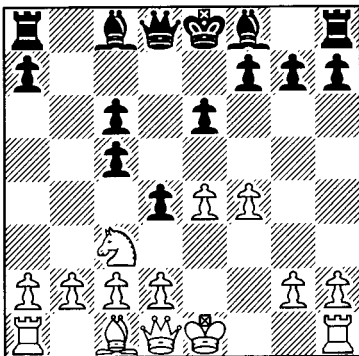
So long as Black displays some patience and remembers the idea of meeting ♕e1-g3 with ...f5, he should have few problems in securing a good game against 6 0-0.

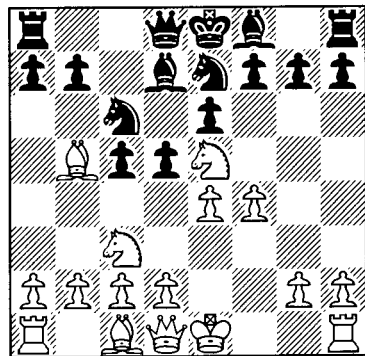
A12)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 f4 e6 4 ♘f3 d5 5 ♗b5 ♘ge7 6 ♘e5

Rather than drift into a slightly passive position with 6 0-0, White displays some urgency. However, this aggressive-looking leap only leads to exchanges and exchanges which give Black quite a comfortable game.

6...♗d7

The simplest. Black prevents the destruction of his structure and secures a good game. However, there is a good if more ambitious alternative available in the 6...d4!? of I.Figler-M.Podgaets, USSR 1971. That continued 7 ♗xc6+ (consistent, but so far as I have found, White has been loath to repeat this; nevertheless, 7 ♘e2 is hardly much of an improvement and 7...♗d7 8 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 9 d3 a6 10 ♗xc6 ♘xc6 11 0-0 f5! secured Black a fully equal game in M.Durao-F.Silva, Portuguese Team Championship 1994) 7...♘xc6 8 ♘xc6 bxc6

9 ♘b1 (perhaps not best, but 9 ♘e2 is also well met by 9...d3 when 10 cxd3 ♕xd3 11 ♕a4 ♔d7 12 ♘c3 ♗a6 13 b3 ♗e7 favours Black whose king is much the happier at having to reside in the centre; the modern day Grand Prix player might prefer 9 ♘a4!? ambitiously hoping to fix Black's pawns with b3 and d3, but even here White appears unable to equalize after 9...d3 10 c3 e5! 11 0-0 exf4 12 ♕f3 g5!) 9...d3 10 c4 e5! 11 ♕f3 exf4 12 e5 (or 12 ♕xf4 ♗d6 13 ♕f3 ♗e5 and White faces continued difficulties on both flanks) 12...♗e7 13 ♕xc6+ ♗d7 14 ♕f3 ♗h4+!? 15 g3 0-0 and, as the bishop was immune (in view of 16 gxh4? ♕xh4+ 17 ♕f2 ♕g5 – as analysed by Gufeld who stopped here with a decisive assessment; Black is indeed winning, but must still display some accuracy – 18 h4 ♕xe5+ 19 ♔f1 ♖ae8 20 ♘c3 ♗g4 21 b3 ♖e6! 22 ♖h2 ♖g6 23 ♗a3 ♗e2+ 24 ♔e1 ♖c8! 25 ♖b1 ♗g4+ 26 ♔f1 ♕f5 and the attack is decisive), Karpov's future second was already well on the way to victory.

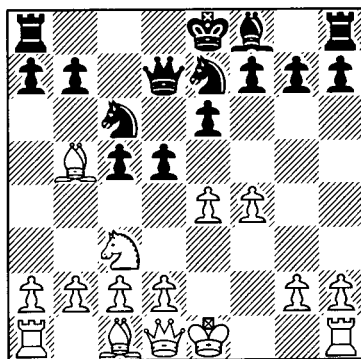
Quite possibly 7 ♗xc6+ must thus be regarded as a mistake and so 6...d4 is at least as good as the more popular 6...♗d7 to which we now return:

7 ♘xd7

This fails to bring White any advantage, but neither do the alternatives challenge the notion that Black has a comfortable game here. For example:

a) 7 ♗xc6 ♘xc6 8 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 9 exd5 exd5 10 0-0 0-0-0!? (ambitious; a simple alternative is 10...♗e7 followed by ...0-0) 11 d3 f5 12 ♖e1 h6 13 ♗d2 ♖g8 14 ♘e2 g5 gave rise to a positionally complex game in F.Andersson-P.Cramling, Stockholm 1999.

b) 7 0-0 ♘xe5 (the most solid; Todorov's 7...d4!? is another good option) 8 fxe5 dxe4 9 ♘xe4 ♘f5 (now Black easily covers his weaknesses on d6 and f7) 10 ♕e2 ♗e7 11 c3 0-0 12 ♗xd7 ♕xd7 13 d3 was finely balanced when G.Vojinovic-B.Abramovic, Jahorina 2001, was agreed drawn.

c) 7 exd5!? is probably the best of these white alternatives, although it does permit Black a reasonable choice. Simplest may well be to transpose to Line A14 with 7...♘xd5, but there is also nothing wrong with 7...♘xe5!? (Plaskett's suggestion of 7...exd5 is unnecessarily risky and 8 ♕f3 then a little awkward) 8 fxe5 ♗xb5 9 ♘xb5 ♘xd5 10 0-0 ♕d7! (correctly forcing the pace, whereas 10...♗e7 11 ♕g4! gives White a small pull) 11 ♘c3 (or 11 c4!? ♘b4 12 ♕g4 a6!? 13 ♘d6+ ♗xd6 14 ♕xg7 ♖f8 15 exd6 ♕xd6 16 ♕f6 ♘d3 with a double-edged position, but also one in which Black's king can always run away via d7) 11...♘xc3 12 bxc3 c4 13 d4 cxd3 14 cxd3 ♖c8 which was roughly balanced in A.Onkoud-S.Mohandesi, Creteil 2002.

7...♕xd7

8 exd5?!

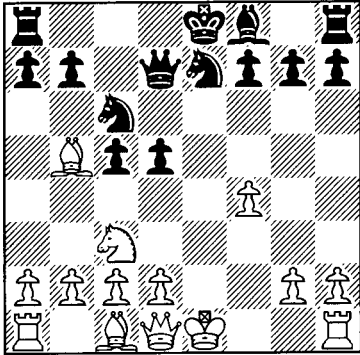
Just as back at move 5, the exchange on d5 fails to convince. Indeed it's a little surprising that Short selected it ahead of the alternatives:

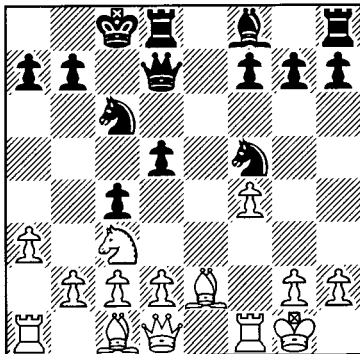
a) 8 ♕f3 a6 (Bangiev's suggestion of 8...dxe4!? 9 ♘xe4 ♘f5 is fine too) 9 ♗xc6 ♕xc6 10 exd5 ♘xd5 11 d3 0-0-0 12 ♗d2 ♘b4 13 ♕xc6+ ♘xc6 14 0-0-0 was sufficient to defeat one of the all-time greats in H.El Kher-B.Larsen, Danish Championship, Aarhus 1999, but clearly at this point Black had no difficulties and might well have continued with the simple 14...♗e7 followed by ...♘d4.

b) 8 d3 a6 9 ♗xc6 ♘xc6 10 0-0 f5!? (not just holding up f4-f5, but also fighting for control of the centre) 11 exd5 exd5 12 ♗d2 ♗e7 13 ♕e2 0-0 14 ♖ae1 ♗f6 15 b3?! (easy to criticize, but White was a touch worse in any case; for example, even 15 ♕e6+ ♕xe6 16 ♖xe6 ♖ad8 17 ♘a4 ♗d4+ 18 ♔h1 ♖fe8 19 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 20 ♖e1 ♖xe1+ 21 ♗xe1 c4 gives Black any chances which are going) 15...♘d4 16 ♕d1 b5 gave Black the initiative in B.Nevednichy-

I.Boleslavsky, Moscow 1966.

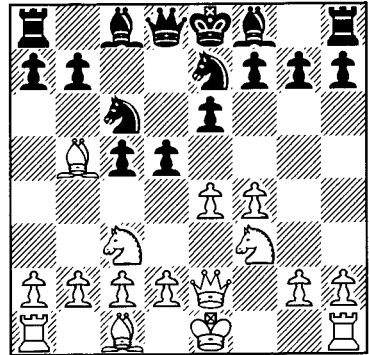
8...exd5!?

Correctly looking to take over the initiative, although there's nothing wrong with the more solid 8...♘xd5 9 0-0 ♗e7.

9 0-0 0-0-0 10 a3 ♘f5

Black's superior central control leaves him slightly for preference. N.Short-V.Topalov, Dos Hermanas 1997, continued 11 ♗e2?! c4!

12 ♗f3 ♗c5+ 13 ♔h1 h5! and with the threat of ...h4 and ...♘g3+, Black was already transferring his lead in development into a strong initiative.

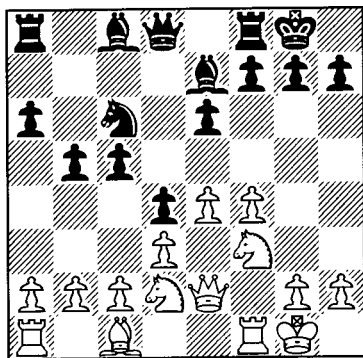
6 ♘e5 leads to simplification, but only simplification quite favourable to Black in the case of either 6...♗d7 or even 6...d4!?.

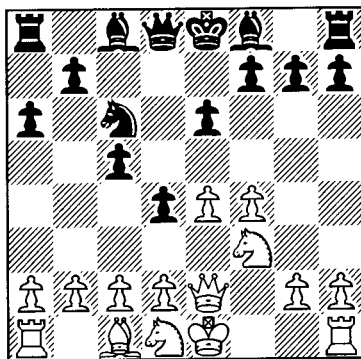
A13)

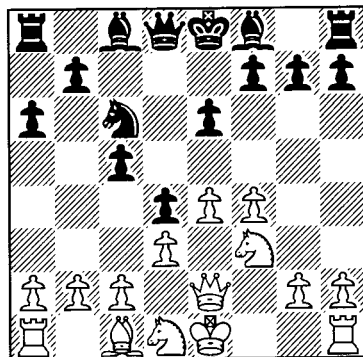
1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 f4 e6 4 ♘f3 d5 5 ♗b5 ♘ge7 6 ♕e2

This is directed against 6...a6 (7 ♗xc6+ then forces the highly undesirable 7...bxc6 since 7...♘xc6? 8 exd5 costs Black a pawn), but does take away the e2-square from the c3-knight and so Black is fully justified in advancing in the centre.

6...d4 7 ♘d1

Probably the best retreat because on f2 the knight is not only well placed for any potential kingside attack, but also doesn't get in the way of White's other pieces. Instead 7 ♘b1 a6 8 ♗xc6+ ♘xc6 9 d3 (essential; 9 a4?! forgets about the option of 9...d3! after which 10 ♕xd3 ♕xd3 11 cxd3 ♗d6 12 e5 ♗e7 13 ♘a3 b5 14 b3 ♗d7 15 axb5 axb5 gave Black more than enough for the pawn in D.Medak-M.Santo Roman, Cannes 1996) 9...♗e7 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♘bd2 b5 reveals the sort of cramp which White is

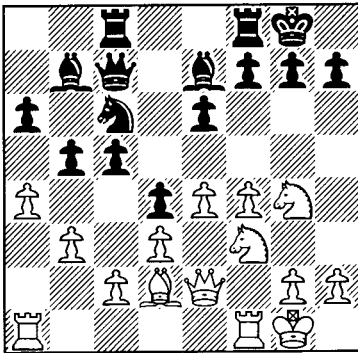
trying to avoid by retreating his knight to d1.

Here it is not particularly easy for White to launch an attack and 12 ♘e5 (alternatively, 12 a3 f5! 13 ♖e1 ♕d6 saw Black employing a typical method of kingside restraint in N.Panagopoulos-I.Nikolaidis, Aghia Pelagia 2004, while 12 e5 can be met by either the dynamic 12...f5!? 13 exf6 gxf6 or the more straightforward 12...♗b7 13 ♘e4 ♘b4 when f4-f5 is still some way from the agenda) 12...♘b4!? (12...♗b7 13 ♘df3 f6 is a simpler and also quite reasonable approach) 13 ♘df3 f6 14 a3 (or 14 ♘g4 ♘c6 when Black will prepare ...c4, while White is rather stymied on the kingside with both his e- and f-pawns unable to satisfactorily advance) 14...fxe5 15 ♘xe5 ♘d5 16 ♘c6 (16 exd5 ♕xd5 17 ♗d2 ♗b7 is also about equal: Black's presence on the long diagonal balancing White's e5-outpost) 16...♕d6 17 exd5 ♗f6 18 ♗d2 ♕xd5 19 ♘a5 e5 saw Black fully equalize in N.Panagopoulos-S.Drazic, Korinthos 1999.

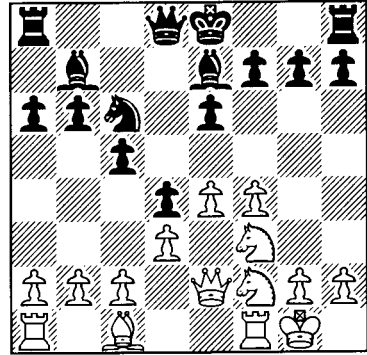
7...a6 8 ♗xc6+ ♘xc6

9 d3

Back in 2002 Raetsky (in his *Meeting 1 e4*) was a little concerned that White might have an edge here, but this doesn't seem to be the case so long as Black is careful. Primarily that means delaying castling to avoid giving White an easy plan of attack, preferring ...♗e7, ...b6 (less weakening than ...b5), ...♗b7, ...♕d7 (to hold up f5) and ...f6. The last move in that sequence is an especially important one, ensuring that Black can meet e5 with ...f5, thereby keeping both lines closed and White out of e4.

9...♗e7 10 0-0

White can also begin with 10 ♘f2, but after 10...b6 play is likely to transpose with 11 0-0. Those not so convinced that ...b5 is a bad option (see the next note) should also examine the game B.Georges-D.Antic, Charleroi 2005: 10...b5!? 11 0-0 ♗b7 12 ♗d2 ♕b6 13 ♔h1?! f6! 14 ♖fb1 ♖c8 15 ♗e1 0-0 and the Serbian grandmaster had quite a reasonable position.

10...b6!

Continuing the plan outlined above. Instead 10...b5 11 a4 ♗b7 isn't so much a problem in that b5 might become weak, but rather because White has some chances of locking the queenside before turning his attention rightwards: for example, 12 b3 ♖c8 13 ♘f2 0-0 14 ♗d2 ♕c7 15 ♘g4

15...♖fd8 (Black might have continued more actively with V.Sokolov's suggestion of 15...f5!?; following 16 exf5 exf5 17 ♕e6+ ♔h8 18 ♘ge5, Black defends with 18...♗d6 and 17 ♘ge5 ♖ce8 also doesn't give White very much at all) 16 ♘e1 ♗f8? 17 f5 e5? 18 ♘f6+! and due to the neat tactical point 18...gxf6 19 ♕g4+ ♔h8 20 ♖f3 ♗g7 21 ♖h3 ♖g8 22 ♖xh7+!, White won in style in the game H.Konarkowska Sokolov-V.Asenova, Subotica 1967. That said, Black's position wouldn't have been so bad had she deviated at move 15 or found 16...f6.

11 ♘f2 ♗b7

12 ♗d2 ♕d7

If Black desires to meet f5 with ...e5 then he might prefer 12...f6, but there's no need to allow White to lock the centre just yet.

13 a3

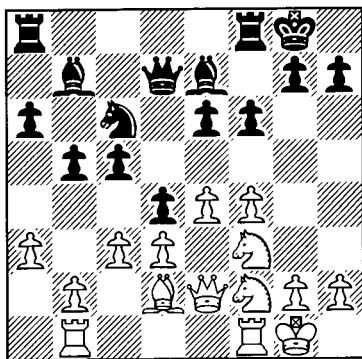
Switching to queenside play, although this could also be seen as a sign of indecision with Black refusing to commit his king. Instead 13 f5 exf5 14 exf5 0-0 is fine for Black; a rook is en route to the e-file and 15 ♘e4 ♕xf5 is a fairly safe pawn grab since 16 ♘h4 ♕e6 17 ♘f5 ♘e5 followed by ...f6 keeps lines closed.

White's other space-gaining advance is 13 e5, but then 13...0-0 (13...♘b4!? is an intriguing alternative since after 14 ♗xb4 cxb4 Black's pressure against c2 and a2 balances his split structure; another possibility is 13...b5

14 ♘e4 ♖c8, but this is a little risky, although Black can defend against an immediate 15 f5!? exf5 16 ♘d6+ with 16...♗xd6 17 exd6+ ♕e6 18 ♖ae1 ♕xe2 19 ♖xe2+ ♔d7 20 ♘g5 g6 21 ♘xf7 ♖he8) 14 ♘e4 is quite playable for Black. White will probably have to indulge in a double-edged g4 to support the f5-advance and so Black may wish to delay touching his f-pawn in favour of 14...♖ac8, although I also quite like 14...f5 15 exf6 gxf6!, followed by ...♖ae8, ...♕d5 and ...♔h8 when White will struggle to improve his position.

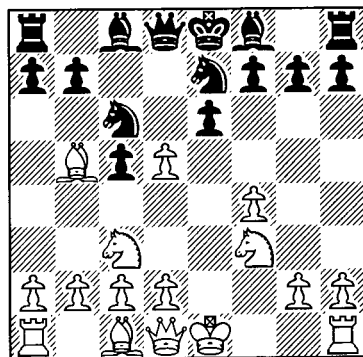
13...f6 14 c3 0-0

Black's most recent try, although he also had a reasonable position after 14...a5 15 ♖fc1 a4! (fixing White's b-pawn thus will always ensure Black of queenside counterplay) 16 cxd4 cxd4 17 ♖c2 0-0 18 ♖ac1 ♖fc8 in the encounter T.L.Petrosian-A.Minasian, Batumi 2003.

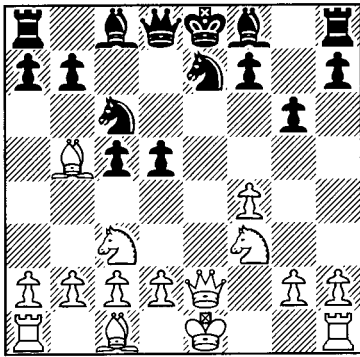
15 ♖ab1 b5

We've been following M.Rujevic-M.Bluvshtein, Tuggeranong 2007, in which White's switch to queenside play (the side Black was intending to play on in any case) wasn't especially convincing. The game continued 16 ♖fc1 ♖fd8 17 c4 bxc4 18 ♖xc4 a5 19 ♖cc1 a4! 20 ♕e1 ♖db8 and Black later broke through on the queenside, while White never made any real progress on the kingside.

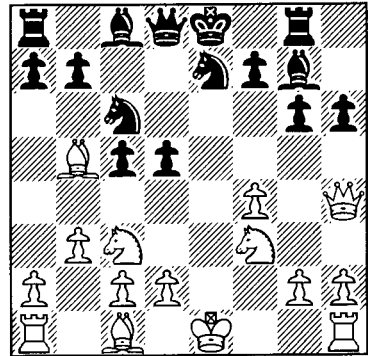
Minasian's plan of delaying kingside castling takes much of the sting out of White's set-up. The whole 6 ♕e2 variation remains quite uncharted, but currently Black is fully holding his own.

A14)

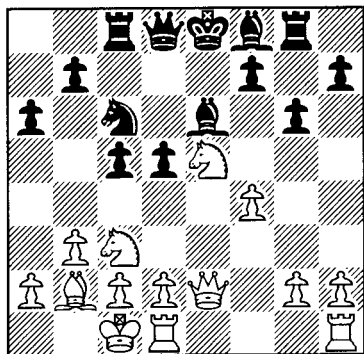
1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 f4 e6 4 ♘f3 d5 5 ♗b5 ♘ge7 6 exd5

6...♘xd5

To those unfamiliar with this variation, it may appear that the wrong sixth move has been denoted as interesting. The text is certainly Black's most uncompromising choice, whereas 6...exd5!? has long been considered inferior, but matters may not be so clear after all. The point is that after 7 ♕e2 Black doesn't have to continue with the common 7...♕d6 (when both 8

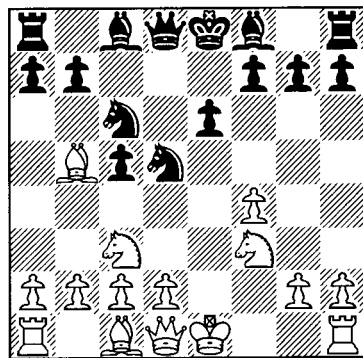
♘e5 and 8 d4 do indeed favour White), but can instead opt for 7...g6!?. This uncompromising choice is an idea of Michael Stean's, recently endorsed by both Shirov and Nataf and not only is it quite playable, but it has been rather neglected by existing theory: for example, the recent *Chess Openings for White, Explained,* which advocates the Grand Prix for White doesn't mention this idea, although, more surprisingly, neither does it cover 6...♘xd5.

Following 7...g6, White has various tries:

a) 8 ♕e5 (the obvious try, but Black will now gain time against the white queen, while his king will be quite happy on either f8 or the queenside) 8...♖g8 9 b3?! (this fails to convince and so I imagine that White might return to 9 0-0 after which 9...♗g7 10 ♗xc6+ bxc6 11 ♕e2 has received a few tests; Black should probably follow V.Fougerit-L.Barbet, French League 2004: 11...♗g4 – preventing ♘e5 – 12 ♕f2 ♗xf3 13 ♕xf3 ♔f8 14 ♖b1 and now 14...♘f5 would have been about even since Black will regroup with ...♗f6 or ...♗d4+ and ...♔g7) 9...♗g7 10 ♕g5 (not the ideal square, but White would have lost material after 10 ♕e2? d4 since the knight can't move due to 11...d3) 10...h6 11 ♕h4

11...g5! (as ever, Shirov is quick to seize the initiative) 12 fxg5? (White shouldn't voluntarily open lines for the black pieces like this; instead the position would have been quite unclear after 12 ♕f2 d4 13 ♘e4 when, for example, 13...♗f5 14 ♘xc5 ♕b6 15 ♗xc6+ ♕xc6 16 ♗a3 gxf4 is one active way for Black to continue) 12...hxg5 13 ♕h5?! (White wouldn't have really had anything for his piece after 13 ♘xg5? ♗f6 14 0-0 ♗xg5 15 ♕h7 ♕d6 16 ♕xf7+ ♔d8, but he had to keep his queen out of danger with 13 ♕g3, even though 13...♘f5! 14 ♕xg5 ♕xg5 15 ♘xg5 ♘e3 is still quite promising for Black) 13...♗f6 14 ♘g1 g4 15 ♕h6 ♘f5 16 ♕f4 ♘fd4 left White already hard-pressed not to lose material in A.Cabrera-A.Shirov, Canada de Calatrava (rapid) 2007.

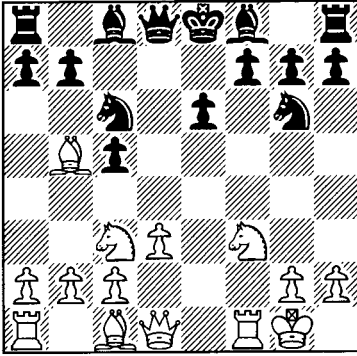
b) 8 ♘e5 ♗e6 9 b3!? (possibly White's most testing continuation) 9...♖c8!? (ambitious, but one can un-

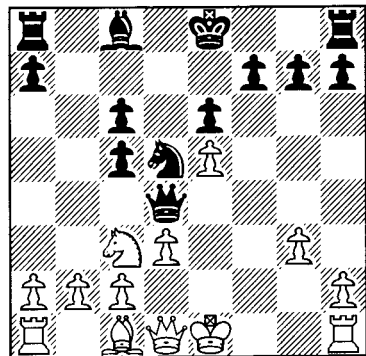
derstand Nataf's desire to avoid being saddled with a potentially bad bishop, as well as the worse structure, in the case of 9...a6 10 ♗xc6+ ♘xc6 11 ♘xc6 bxc6 12 ♗b2 ♗g7 13 ♘a4 ♗xb2 14 ♘xb2, although here 14...c4!? may not be so bad for Black) 10 ♗b2 ♖g8! 11 0-0-0 a6 12 ♗xc6+ ♘xc6

13 ♘xc6 ♖xc6 was the course of G.Jones-I.Nataf, European Championship, Dresden 2007; two very creative players in opposition here. Black's rook manoeuvres may take some time to appreciate, but he appears to be doing fairly well. At least I haven't been able to find a way for White to strike before Black puts his bishop-pair and centre to good use. The game continued 14 g4 ♗e7 15 ♖de1 d4! 16 ♘e4 ♕d7 17 ♖hg1 ♔d8 18 d3 ♖e8 and if anyone had to play accurately to maintain the balance it was White.

c) 8 ♗xc6+ bxc6 9 0-0 ♗g7 10 ♖e1 (White's most straightforward approach, but the weakness of d4 gives Black good counterplay) 10...♗g4! 11 d3 ♗xf3 12 ♕xf3 0-0 13 ♗d2 ♘f5 14 g3?! c4! saw Black seizing the initiative in F.Niebling-A.Shirov, Frankfurt (rapid) 1996.

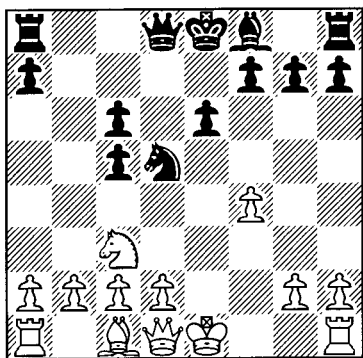
Returning to theory's preference, 6...♘xd5:

7 ♘e5

Increasing the pressure against c6, but there are two quite popular alternatives:

a) 7 0-0!? ♘xf4! (Black should accept the pawn, whereas 7...♗d7?! is clearly undesirable due to Lane's 8 ♘xd5 exd5 9 ♖e1+ ♗e7 10 ♕e2, while 7...♗e7 8 ♗xc6+ bxc6 9 ♘e5 ♕c7 10 d3 gives White an edge; Black would like to have traded his little-squared bishop before receiving doubled c-pawns, as indeed he manages in our main line) 8 d3 (slightly surprisingly 8 d4!? remains untested, although after 8...♘g6 9 ♗e3 cxd4 10 ♘xd4 ♗d7 11 ♕f3 ♕f6!? 12 ♕e2 ♕e5 13 ♕f2 f6 Black's Polugaevsky-like queen activation appears to have kept everything covered; of course, there are other options too, such as 8...cxd4!? 9 ♘e5 dxc3 10 ♕xd8+ ♔xd8 11 ♘xf7+ ♔c7 which looks like a reasonable exchange sacrifice, although this is far from forced) 8...♘g6

9 ♘g5 (aiming straight at f7; White has also built up more slowly, but after 9 ♕e2 ♗e7 10 ♗xc6+ bxc6 11 ♗e3 0-0 12 ♘e4 Black wouldn't have had any problems in Z.Turi-I.Fodor, correspondence 1975, had he returned the pawn with 12...♖b8 13 b3 e5!) 9...f6 10 ♗xc6+ bxc6 11 ♕f3 ♘e5 12 ♕h5+!? (White preferred 12 ♕g3 in S.Korolev-E.Obukhovski, Moscow 1973, but after Plaskett's sensible suggestion of 12...♗e7 I'm not convinced by White's compensation; for example, 13 ♘ge4 0-0 14 ♗e3 c4 15 d4 ♘g6 and Black is better since he can arrange ...e5) 12...g6 13 ♕e2 h6! (wisely chasing White backwards to avoid being sadly with two extremely ugly sets of doubled pawns as occurs after, for example, 13...♗e7 14 ♗f4 ♕d4+ 15 ♔h1 0-0 16 ♗xe5 ♕xe5 17 ♕xe5 fxe5) 14 ♘f3 reaches quite an unclear position. White has forced the whole black kingside forward and has some compensation, but it is not that easy to attack those black kingside pawns which may well turn out to be quite mobile. Now there are a number of options deserving of attention, including 14...♘f7, but simplest is 14...♘xf3+!? 15 ♕xf3 f5 16 ♕xc6+ ♗d7 17 ♕f3 ♗g7 when Black's extra central pawn begins to look quite useful.

b) 7 ♗xc6+ bxc6 8 ♘e5 (attempting to saddle Black with a bad light-squared bishop after all, but there is a good and forcing response available; 8 d3 is also quite well met by 8...♗d6 when, for example, 9 g3 – or 9 ♘e4 ♗xf4 10 ♗xf4 ♘xf4 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♕d2 e5! 13 ♘xe5 ♕d4+ 14 ♔h1 ♕xe5 15 ♕xf4 ♕xb2 with rough equality – 9...♘xc3!? 10 bxc3 ♕f6 gives Black reasonable counterplay for his bad bishop; L.Szell-Z.Szabo, Hungarian League 1998, instructively continued 11 ♗d2 c4! 12 d4 c5 13 ♘e5 ♗b7 14 0-0 cxd4 15 cxd4 0-0 16 c3?! ♗xe5! 17 fxe5 ♕d8 and how the prospects of the light-squared bishop had been improved) 8...♗d6! (now 9 0-0 can be met by 9...♘xf4, while 9 ♘xc6 ♕c7 wins back the pawn) 9 d3 ♗xe5 10 fxe5 ♕h4+ 11 g3 ♕d4

12 ♘xd5 (White later preferred the more ambitious 12 ♘e4?! ♕xe5 13 ♕e2, but after 13...c4! 14 dxc4 ♗a6 Black

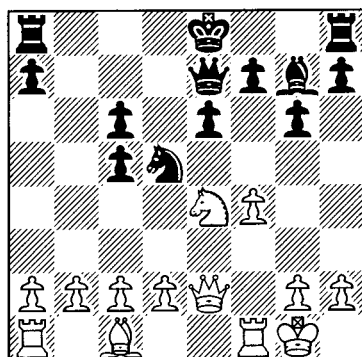
stood quite well in F.Podini-E.Bozzali, Corsica 2004) 12...exd5 (opening up the light-squared bishop, but there was also nothing wrong with 12...cxd5!? when Becerra Rivero has analysed 13 ♕h5 0-0 14 ♖f1 ♗a6 15 ♖f4 and the game ends in a repetition after 15...♕g1+ 16 ♖f1 ♕g2 17 ♖f2 ♕g1+) 13 ♕e2 0-0 14 c3 ♕g4 15 ♗e3 ♕g6!? (more ambitious than 15...d4 which would have been pretty even, especially in the event of multiple exchanges) 16 ♗xc5 ♖e8 gave Black sufficient play for his pawn in A.Minasian-J.Becerra Rivero, World Team Championship, Lucerne 1997.

7...♗d7 8 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 9 ♘xc6 bxc6

After a few fairly forced moves we reach an important position. Black's queenside has been split, but his strong central knight compensates for that along with the weaknesses created by the f4-advance. Practice has shown the position to be roughly balanced and it should suit the fighting black player, especially if aiming for the full point.

10 0-0

Much less common is 10 ♕f3 when Black might choose to quickly attack f4, as he did in J.Cubas-V.Marques, Vicente Lopez 2003: 10...♗d6!? (10...g6 was another option; perhaps White then intended 11 ♘xd5 cxd5 12 ♕c3, but Black is fine after both 12...♖g8 and 12...d4 13 ♕f3 ♕d5!?) 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♘e2 f5 13 c4 ♘e7 14 b3 e5! and the position was rather unclear.

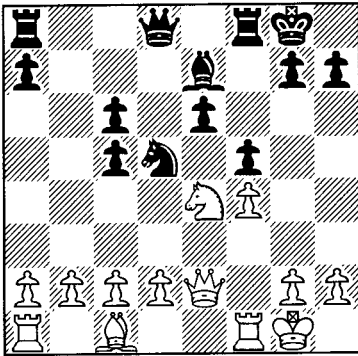
10...♗e7

This might appear a little passive, but Black has an active follow-up in mind as he pursues the initiative. He can also consider 10...g6!?, bringing the dark-squared bishop to its best diagonal while also ruling out f4-f5. This uncompromising idea does, however, risk leaving c5 a little weak, but certainly deserves further testing. One of its few outings was A.Kosten-S.Cvetkovic, Belgrade 1988: 11 ♕e2 ♗g7 12 ♘e4 ♕e7

13 d3 (White deviated with 13 ♕a6!? 0-0 14 d3 in J.Verleur-T.Padjar, correspondence 1998, only for Black to reject the consistent 14...f5 when 15 ♘d2? runs into 15...♗d4+ 16 ♔h1 ♘e3 and 15 ♘g5 ♕d6 16 c3 e5 gives Black good counterplay) 13...0-0 14 c3 f5! (just

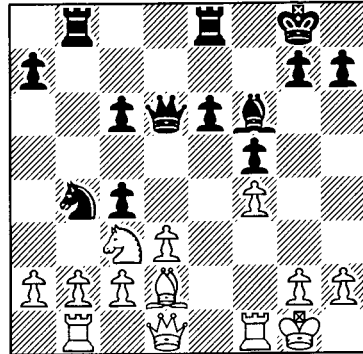
as in our main line) 15 ♘d2 e5 16 ♘c4 ♖ae8 17 fxe5 ♗xe5 18 ♕f2 f4 and the weakness of e3 ensured that the position remained dynamically balanced.

11 ♕e2

By far the most popular response. Smyslov once preferred 11 ♘e4, but 11...c4! 12 d4 cxd3 13 ♕xd3 0-0 worked out fairly well for Black, especially after 14 f5?! exf5 15 ♖xf5 ♕b6+, in A.Matras-S.Vesselovsky, Trinec 2003.

11...0-0 12 ♘e4 f5!

A key idea to leave Black the only side with a superbly-centralized knight. Practice has now seen:

a) 13 ♘g5?! ♘xf4! (an important tactical point behind Black's last) 14 ♖xf4 ♗xg5 15 ♕xe6+ ♔h8 16 ♖f2 ♖e8 17 ♕c4 ♖e1+ 18 ♖f1 (M.Lazic-S.Cvetkovic, Igalo 1994) 18...♕e7! 19 ♖xe1 (and not, of course, 19 d3?? ♕e2 when White must resign; a better alternative is 19 b3, although Black is still for choice after 19...♖d8) 19...♕xe1+ 20 ♕f1 ♖e8 21 d3 ♗xc1 22 ♖xc1 ♕d2 and Black's rather useful initiative persists into the ending.

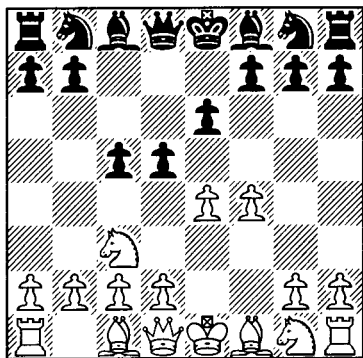
b) 13 ♘c3 ♕d6 14 d3 ♗f6 15 ♗d2 ♖ab8 16 ♖ab1 ♖fe8 17 ♕f3 ♘b4! 18 ♕d1 c4

also left Black very actively placed in M.Hebden-A.Miles, Manchester 1982.

c) 13 ♘g3 ♕d6 14 d3 ♗f6 15 c3 g6! 16 ♖e1 ♖fe8 17 ♕f2 e5 once more saw Black's initiative at least fully compensate for his inferior structure in the game J.Vivante Sowter-G.Peli, correspondence 1999.

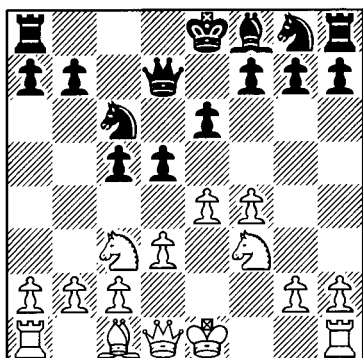
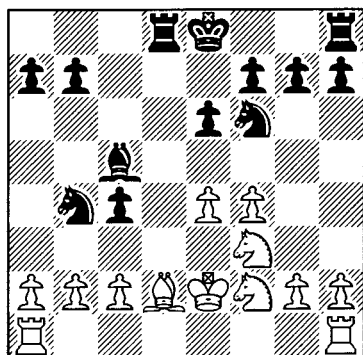
It requires quite a creative mindset to employ 6...exd5 7 ♕e2 g6!?, but I do rather like this provocative idea. Those seeking something similarly double-edged but more straightforward shouldn't have any problems preferring 6...♘xd5, a line which is in good theoretical health.

A2)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 e6 3 f4 d5

And why not? Black takes the opportunity to logically advance in the centre, just as he can against the Closed Sicilian. Those who feel that the text gives rise to positions a little too solid for their taste can, of course, transpose to our last section (A1) with 3...♘c6.

4 ♘f3

White's most flexible and popular choice. He also has one important alternative and three minor ones:

a) 4 ♗b5+ ♗d7 5 ♗xd7+ ♕xd7 6 d3 (6 ♘f3 ♘c6 usually transposes after 7 d3) 6...♘c6 7 ♘f3 sees the exchange of light-squared bishops leave both sides with fairly comfortable positions. Black must now decide how ambitiously to continue:

a1) 7...dxe4 8 dxe4 (or 8 ♘xe4 when, just like in our main line, Black has a reasonable choice between 8...♘f6 9 ♘xf6+ gxf6 and 8...♘h6, not to mention the solid 8...♗e7; after 8...♘h6, 9 0-0 ♗e7 10 ♔h1 ♘f5 already gives Black a good game due to his control of d4 with G.Pongracz-G.Siegel, Arosa 1996, continuing 11 a3 ♖d8 12 ♕e2 0-0 13 ♗d2 ♘cd4 14 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 15 ♕d1 c4! and Black was slightly better) 8...♕xd1+ 9 ♘xd1 ♘f6 10 ♘f2 (or 10 e5 ♘d5 11 c3 ♗e7 12 ♘f2 0-0-0 13 ♗d2 ♖d7 14 0-0-0 ♖hd8 15 c4 and the position was quite even as H.Hebbinghaus-S.Linke, German League 1999, was agreed drawn) 10...♘b4! 11 ♔d1 ♖d8+ 12 ♗d2 c4 13 ♔e2 ♗c5

14 ♗xb4!? (the position is roughly level after 14 e5 ♘fd5 15 ♘e4 ♗e7) 14...♗xb4 15 ♖hd1 ♔e7 should have been met by 16 g3 in M.Rivas Pastor-J.Lautier, Madrid 1993, whereas 16 ♘e5?! ♗d6! 17 ♘xc4 ♗xf4 18 e5?! (I can only imagine that White assumed that ...♗xh2 couldn't work, but with his f-pawn missing and e5 weak, this was a careless evaluation) 18...♘d7 19 ♖d4 ♗xh2! netted an important pawn and only a hideous blunder later prevented Lautier from gaining the full point.

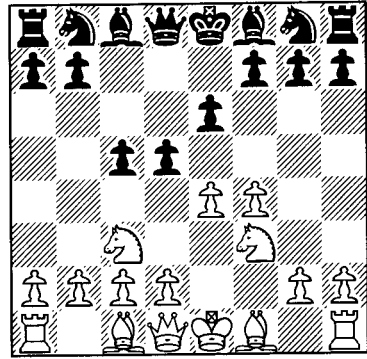
a2) 7...d4 8 ♘e2 f5!? is a more dynamic handling after which 9 0-0 (or 9

♘g3 ♗d6 10 exf5 exf5 11 ♕e2+ ♘ge7 when 12 ♘g5?! lost time after 12...h6 in N.Gamboa-J.Borges Mateos, Cali 2000, since 13 ♘e6 was impossible on account of 13...♔f7, trapping the errant knight) 9...0-0-0! 10 exf5 exf5 11 ♘e5 ♕c7 12 c4 dxc3 13 bxc3 ♗d6 gave Black sufficient counterplay in the game Y.Dolzhenkov-N.Vitiugov, Smolensk 2005.

b) 4 exd5 exd5 5 ♗b5+ ♘c6 is likely to transpose after 6 ♘f3 to a position we considered in variation 'a1' to White's 5th move in Line A1 (6 ♕e2+ ♗e7 makes little difference and Black might also prefer here 6...♘ge7 7 ♘f3 g6!?, as we examined in Line A14).

c) 4 e5 is again a little misguided and 4...♘c6 5 ♘f3 ♘h6 was examined in note 'b' to White's 5th move in Line A1.

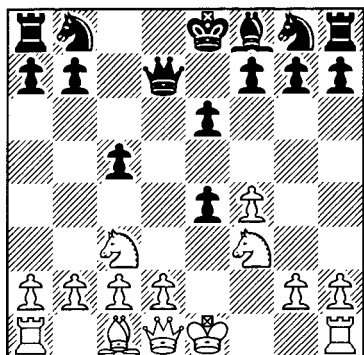
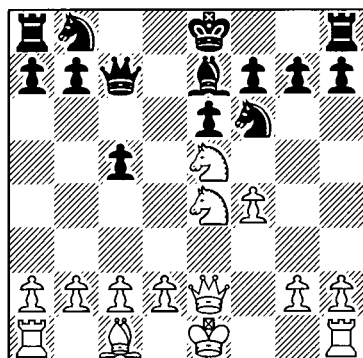
d) 4 d3 gives Black a choice between allowing the centre to close with 4...♘c6 5 ♘f3 ♘f6 6 e5 and the solid 4...dxe4 5 dxe4 ♕xd1+ 6 ♘xd1 (Hort has preferred 6 ♔xd1 when a good response is 6...♘f6, preventing 7 ♘b5 on account of 7...♘xe4; H.Hebbinghaus-P.Ottmann, Berlin 1996, saw instead 7 ♘f3 ♗e7 8 ♗b5+ ♗d7 9 ♗xd7+ ♘bxd7 10 ♔e2 0-0 11 ♖d1 ♖fd8 and now even 12 e5 ♘e8 13 ♗e3 would have been quite acceptable for Black after 13...♘b6! 14 ♘e4 ♘d5) 6...♘f6 7 ♘f2. Here I quite like the idea of continuing to attack e4 with 7...♗d7!?, intending ...♗c6 and ...♘bd7, but in practice Black has preferred 7...♘c6 8 c3 ♗d7 and now 9 ♘f3 ♗e7 10 ♗e3 0-0 11 ♗e2 ♖fd8 12 0-0 a6 13 g4 ♗e8! remained about equal in M.Paris-O.Sick, German League 1996.

Returning to 4 ♘f3:

4...dxe4

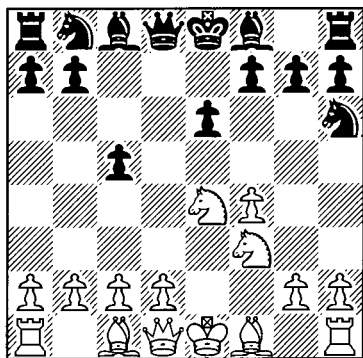
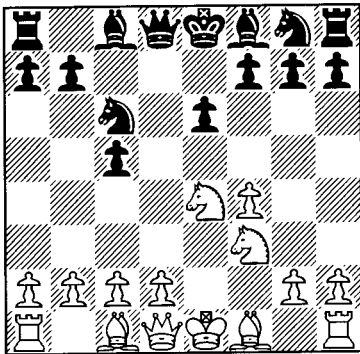
The solid course. Black decides that the addition of ...c5 and f4 gives him an improved version of the Rubinstein French. He should, though, avoid 4...d4 5 ♘e2 d3?! since here 6 cxd3 ♕xd3 7 ♘c3 gives White some initiative, but, of course, 4...♘c6 is again a good alternative, returning play to Line A1.

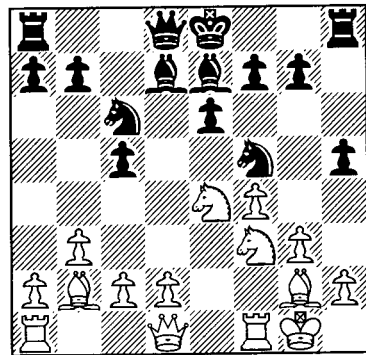
5 ♘xe4

A somewhat less common option is 5 ♗b5+, but this has received some recent attention after being recommended in *Chess Openings for White, Explained*. Alburt and Dzindzi's coverage continues 5...♗d7 (5...♘c6?! is no longer ideal since Black gets his pawns broken for insufficient compensation, but the rare 5...♘d7 6 ♘xe4 a6 cannot be so bad: White must either retreat his bishop to a not terribly good square or try 7 ♗xd7+ ♕xd7!? 8 ♘e5 ♕c7, but then Black will prepare a queenside fianchetto and 9 d4 cxd4 10 ♕xd4 ♘h6 11 0-0 ♘f5 12 ♕f2 ♗e7 fails to bring White any advantage) 6 ♗xd7+ ♘xd7 7 ♘xe4 ♘gf6 8 d3 when they already stop, feeling that White is slightly for

preference. However, Black is very solid and this is by no means a bad position for the second player. I also like the idea of earlier in this sequence preferring 6...♕xd7!?, tempting White's knight forwards so as to make it easier to engineer further exchanges.

This line is already rather uncommon and in M.Hebden-J.Nicholson, Ramsgate 1979, 7 ♘e5 (there's nothing, of course, wrong with 7 ♘xe4 which can be compared with our main line; the exchange of light-squared bishops reduces any possibility of Black becoming cramped and he was quite comfortable after 7...♘c6 8 b3 ♘h6 9 ♗b2 ♘f5 10 ♕e2 ♗e7 11 0-0 0-0 in O.Barbosa-D.Kuljasevic, Chalkidiki 2003) 7...♕c7 8 ♕e2 (or 8 ♘xe4 and now 8...♘c6 is the sane approach, but in G.Matjushin-V.Karasev, St Petersburg 2000, Black came up with something much more creative: 8...f6!? 9 ♕h5+ g6 10 ♘xg6 ♕f7 11 f5 ♘c6, preparing to sacrifice the exchange and 12 ♘g3 hxg6! 13 ♕xh8 exf5 14 0-0 0-0-0 certainly gave Black good compensation due to White's offside queen in the game) 8...♘f6 9 ♘xe4 ♗e7

10 ♕b5+ (already trying to bale out; White later tried 10 ♘g5 0-0, but then 11 ♘exf7? ♖xf7 12 ♕xe6 ♗f8 13 ♘xf7 ♕xf7 14 ♕xf7+ ♔xf7 clearly favours Black's active minor pieces and 11 0-0 ♘c6 12 d3 ♘d4 13 ♕f2 ♘d5 14 ♘e4 f6 left White a little worse in M.Navarro-M.Kuijf, Sitges 1994) 10...♘bd7 11 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 12 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 13 ♕xd7+ ♔xd7 left White the side who had to be accurate to hold the draw.

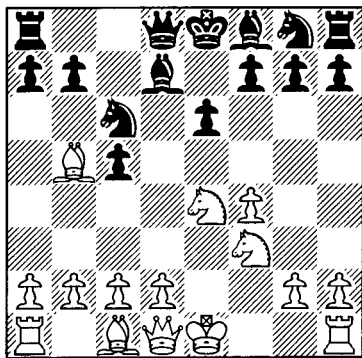
5...♘c6

If Black is happy to bring his knight to f5 (a logical step to take advantage of the slightly weakening aspect to f4), he might prefer to begin with 5...♘h6!?.

Play can easily transpose to our 5...♘c6 coverage, below, although W.Watson-B.Kurajica, Amsterdam 1985, quickly followed an independent course: 6 d4!? (White has also tried 6 ♘g3 to discourage ...♘f5, but his own knight isn't so great on g3 and after 6...♗e7 7 ♗c4 0-0 8 0-0 ♘c6 9 d3 ♘g4 10 h3 ♘f6 11 ♕e2 ♕c7 12 ♘e4 ♘a5! both knights had been improved and Black had good counterplay in C.Filgueira Fernandez-M.Pila Diez, Seville 1999) 6...cxd4 7 ♕xd4 and now I quite like the simple 7...♕xd4 (7...♕c7!? 8 ♗d2 ♘c6 9 ♕c3 ♘f5 was much more double-edged in the game; perhaps White should now prevent ...♗b4 with 10 a3!? when 10...♘fe7!? might well be best) 8 ♘xd4 a6, intending ...♗d7 and ...♘c6.

6 ♗b5

White's most popular choice, but not everyone is so keen to potentially have to cede the bishop-pair on c6. Indeed Mark Hebden, the inventor of the so-called Toilet variation which we've transposed to after 5 ♘xe4, used to prefer 6 g3 after which 6...♘h6!? (a good alternative is 6...♘f6, meeting 7 ♘f2 with 7...g6) 7 ♗g2 ♗e7 is one reasonable set-up for Black, as in S.Conquest-I.Novikov, Ostrava 1994: 8 0-0 (or 8 d3 0-0 9 0-0 and now Black should opt for either 9...♘f5 or 9...b6; after the latter, 10 ♘e5 ♗b7 11 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 12 ♘f6+ ♗xf6 13 ♗xc6 ♖c8 14 ♗e4 ♘f5 isn't anything to be afraid of since Black's grip on d4 and well-placed minor pieces counterbalance White's bishop-pair) 8...♘f5 (it's also possible to leave the knight on h6 for a while and 8...0-0 9 c3 b6 10 d3 ♗b7 looks like a good alternative; A.Cabrera-C.Lopez, Cuba 1997, continued 11 ♘e5 ♕c7 12 g4?! and now Black made good use out of keeping his knight on h6 with 12...f5! 13 gxf5 exf5) 9 b3 h5! (preventing g4 and hinting at a possible attack with ...h4; g4 h3) 10 ♗b2 ♗d7

11 ♕e1 ♘b4!? 12 ♕c1 f6 13 a3 ♘c6 14 ♕e1 ♕b6 when White lacked a good plan and Black was quite comfortable.

White has also been known to head for a double fianchetto set-up by beginning with 6 b3 when 6...♘h6 7 ♗b2 ♘f5 8 g3 h5 9 ♗g2 ♗d7 (it's also tempting to push on with 9...h4!? which may explain why White preferred 9 ♘f2 on

the one occasion that 8...h5 was seen in practice) 10 0-0 ♗e7 transposes back to Conquest-Novikov, above.

6...♗d7

7 0-0

White has also tried 7 ♕e2 when 7...♘h6 remains a good reply, focussing on the weakened d4-square:

a) 8 b3 ♗e7 9 ♗b2 ♘f5 10 0-0 (or 10 0-0-0 ♘fd4 11 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 12 ♗xd7+ ♕xd7 13 ♕f2 0-0 14 c3 f5! and all the exchanges gave Black easy equality in B.Heberla-V.Erdos, Balatonlelle 2002) 10...0-0 11 c4!? ♘b4! 12 ♗xd7 ♕xd7 13 ♘e5 ♕d8 14 ♗c3 ♘d4 was equal in J.Maiwald-A.Shchekachev, Hamburg 2005; both sides' strong knights limit the other's active options.

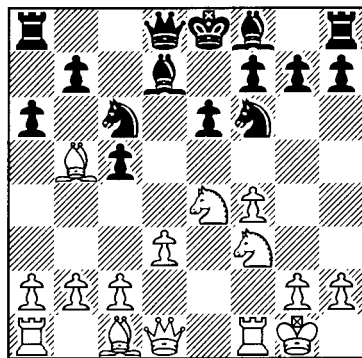
b) 8 0-0 ♗e7 (or 8...a6!? 9 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 10 b3 ♘f5 11 ♗b2 ♗e7 12 ♘e5 ♖c8 13 d3 0-0 14 ♖ae1 ♘d4 with rough equality in L.Yudasin-M.Ulibin, Las Palmas 1993; once again the weakness of d4 enables Black to close down the otherwise powerful b2-bishop) 9 c3 0-0 10 ♔h1 ♘g4! (now that White has ruled out ...♘d4 and looks set to meet ...♘f5 with g4, Black sensibly reroutes his knight) 11 ♗d3!? ♕c7 12 ♗c2 ♖ae8 13 d3 f5 14 ♘f2 ♘f6 was fine for Black in R.Lau-M.Thesing, German League 2000.

7...♘f6

Kramnik's choice and a pretty reasonable approach, but so too is again 7...♘h6 when play often transposes to the notes to White's 7th after 8 ♕e2 or 8 b3 ♗e7 9 ♗b2 ♘f5 10 ♕e2 (White doesn't have to transpose, but he lacks an especially good alternative; for example, here 10 g4 ♘fd4 11 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 12 ♗d3 was preferred in J.Pribyl-I.Nei, Tallinn 1973; this is about equal and now Black might well break up white kingside with Keres' suggestion of 12...h5!?).

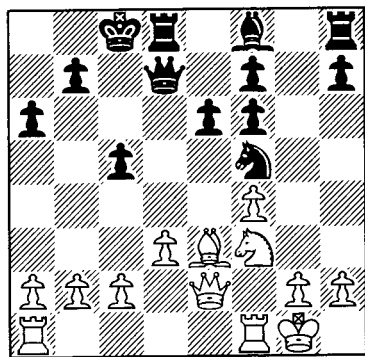
8 d3

White has also exchanged immediately when, as well as the solid 8 ♘xf6+ ♕xf6 9 ♘e5 ♖c8 10 ♘xd7 ♔xd7 11 c3 ♗d6 12 d3 ♖hd8 of M.Sadler-J.Lautier, Monaco (blindfold) 1998, I quite like 8...gxf6!? à la Kramnik after which 9 f5 ♕c7 10 fxe6 fxe6 gave Black easy and active play in G.Malbran-S.Mellano, Buenos Aires 1993.

8...a6

9 ♘xf6+

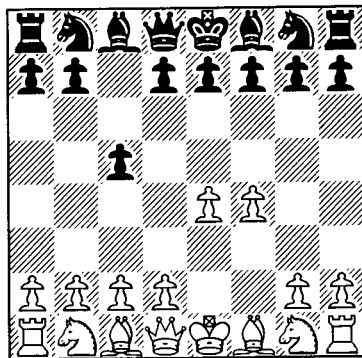
It makes sense to maintain White's light-squared bishop, rather than allow Black's to dominate from the c6-square. Indeed 9 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 10 ♘xf6+ gxf6 11 ♕e2 ♕d5 12 ♗d2 0-0-0 13 ♗c3 ♗e7 followed by ...♖hg8 saw White come under some kingside pressure in E.Gerbelli Neto-J.Rosito, Serra Negra 2002.

9...gxf6!

This strong recapture, ruling out ♘e5 once and for all while opening the g-file, was the choice of the world champion in J.Polgar-V.Kramnik, Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2003, which continued 10 ♗a4 ♘d4 11 ♗xd7+ ♕xd7 12 ♗e3 ♘f5 13 ♕e2 0-0-0 with quite a dynamic set-up and good prospects of counterplay for Black.

For those who can meet 2 ♘c3 with 2...e6, the Grand Prix does not look especially terrifying. Black's plan of ...♘h6-f5 after 3 f4 d5 4 ♘f3 dxe4 5 ♘xe4 ♘c6 is quite easy to employ, although he has too some pretty reasonable alternatives, as demonstrated by Kramnik.

B)

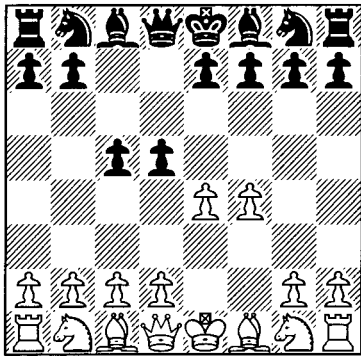
1 e4 c5 2 f4

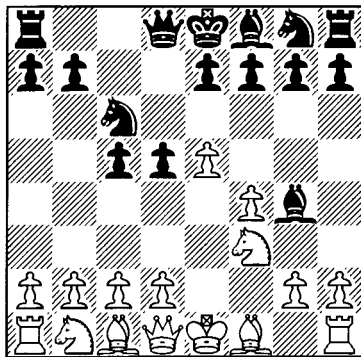
The original Grand Prix move order, as used by the likes of Rumens and Hebden when they were racking up win after win with the system back in the good old days of the Grand Prix weekend circuit (in the UK).

We will now focus on:

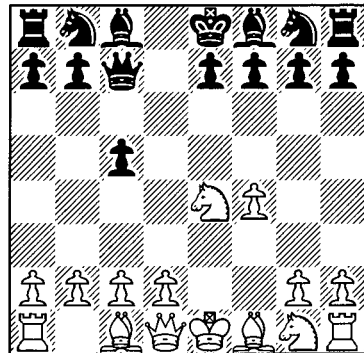
B1: 2...d5
B2: 2...e6

Line B1 is the main theoretical reason why 2 f4 has been superseded by 2 ♘c3 and only then 3 f4. However, not everyone may feel so confident taking White on in the fairly obscure positions which arise, and such players should prefer the solid Line B2.

Yet another move order which Black may wish to consider is 2...♘c6 3 ♘f3 e6 when White usually chooses between 4 ♘c3, transposing to Line A1, and 4 ♗b5 after which 4...♘ge7 reaches a system discussed in the notes to Black's 3rd move in Line B2.

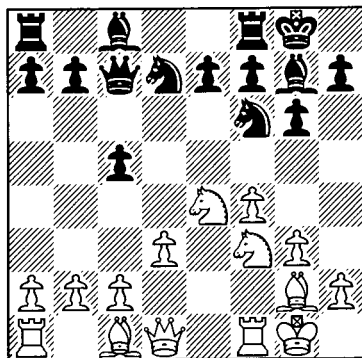
B1)
1 e4 c5 2 f4 d5

3 exd5

White must allow his centre to be broken up, although at club level 3 e5?! is quite a common mistake. Now Black will gain an improved French with his light-squared bishop outside the pawn chain (or a superior Caro-Kann if you prefer; Black has played ...c5 in one move), and that is sufficient to ensure him of a good game: for example, 3...Nc6 4 Nf3 (or 4 Bb5 Bf5 5 Nf3 e6 6 c3?! Qb6 7 Qe2 c4! and Black was better due to the chronic weakness of d3 in P.Hasler-J.Gallagher, Lenk 1992) 4...Bg4

5 Be2 (White might play more actively, but after 5 h3 Bxf3 6 Qxf3 e6 7 c3, as well as 7...Nge7, intending ...Nf5 and possibly ...h5, Black can also think about more aggressive options, as shown by the 7...g5!? of H.Gohlke-M.Wahls, Berlin 1994) 5...e6 6 0-0 Qb6 7 d3 Nge7 (if Black wishes to saddle White with a none-too-useful light-squared bishop, he should consider 7...Bxf3!? 8 Bxf3 Nge7) 8 Nd4!? Bxe2 9 Nxe2 Nf5 10 Kh1 h5 already slightly favoured Black in K.Majewski-R.Palliser, London 2002.

A better alternative to the text is 3 Nc3, the so-called Toilet variation. Black can now transpose to Line A2 with 3...d5 and play also reaches our coverage there after 3...dxe4 4 Nxe4 e6 5 Nf3. An independent and good alternative is 4...Qc7!? and now:

a) 5 g3 b6 (logical, although a good alternative is 5...Nf6 when play is likely to transpose to variation 'c', below, such as with 6 d3 Nbd7 7 Bg2 g6 8 Nf3 Bg7) 6 Bg2 Bb7 7 Qe2 was the beginning of the infamous game Pa.Horn-A.Shabalov, Geneva 1992. Rather than lose a rook with Shabalov's 7...g6??,

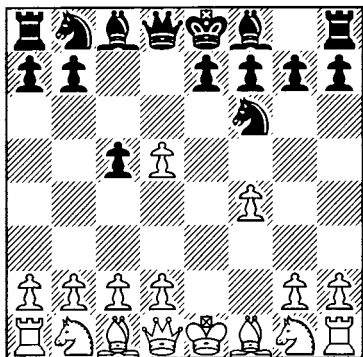
Black should prefer 7...♘c6 with an easy game; for example, 8 ♘f3 g6 9 0-0 ♗g7 10 c3 ♘h6! 11 b3 0-0 12 ♗b2 ♖fe8 13 ♖ae1 ♖ad8 left White already on the back foot due to his weaknesses down the d-file in P.Holmberg-J.Ojeda, correspondence 2005.

b) 5 ♗c4!? is an interesting gambit, but only if Black accepts. His queen is quite well placed on c7 in any case, and at some point White must defend f4. Pa.Horn-A.Hauchard, Geneva 1996, continued instructively: 5...♘f6! (throughout this sub-variation, we will see Black happy to gain doubled f-pawns; in return he gains strong pressure down the central files, while White is hampered by his weaknesses on d4 and f4) 6 d3 ♘c6 7 ♘f3 b5! 8 ♗xb5?! (not best, although 8 ♘xf6+ exf6 is quite pleasant for Black since the b-pawn is, of course, immune due to the check on a5) 8...♘xe4 9 ♗xc6+ ♕xc6 10 dxe4 ♕xe4+ and Black was better due to his bishop-pair.

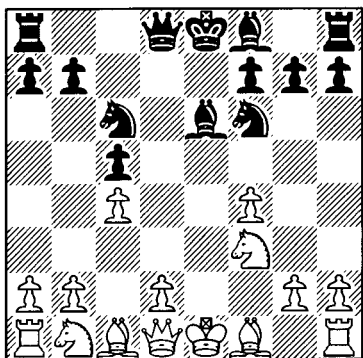
c) 5 ♘f3 ♘f6 6 d3 (White has been loath to exchange knights ever since the game E.Ermenkov-A.Adorjan, Budapest 1993: 6 ♘xf6+ exf6 7 g3 ♗e7 8 ♗g2 0-0 9 0-0 ♘c6 10 b3 ♗g4 11 h3 ♗e6 12 d3 ♖fd8 13 ♗e3 ♖ac8 and the black position was the more pleasant since it could be much more easily improved, especially with ...f5, ...♗f6 and a later ...♘d4; White might have preferred to open the position with 7 d4, but then Adorjan and Feher offer 7...cxd4 8 ♘xd4 ♗e7 9 ♗e2 0-0 10 0-0 ♖d8 11 ♗e3 ♘c6 12 c3 ♗c5 and again Black is better) 6...♘bd7 7 g3 (White's most common set-up after 4...♕c7; this solves the problem of the light-squared bishop, but still leaves his dark-squared bishop a slightly problematic piece) 7...g6 8 ♗g2 ♗g7 9 0-0 0-0 has been tested in a few games and is fine for Black;

for example, 10 ♕e2 (or 10 c3 b6 11 f5!? ♘xe4 12 dxe4 ♗a6 13 ♖f2 ♖ad8 14 ♗f4 ♕c8 and with 15...♘f6 to follow, any hope that White had of gaining the initiative had been fully neutralized in D.Rosen-R.Palliser, British League 1997) 10...b6 11 ♘f2 (as Chandler points out, 11 f5 is probably better, although 11...♗b7 12 ♗f4 ♕c8 leaves White short of a strong follow-up) 11...♗b7 12 ♗d2 ♖ae8 13 ♖ae1 saw Black able to fight for the initiative with 13...e5!? in J.Hodgson-M.Chandler, London 1985.

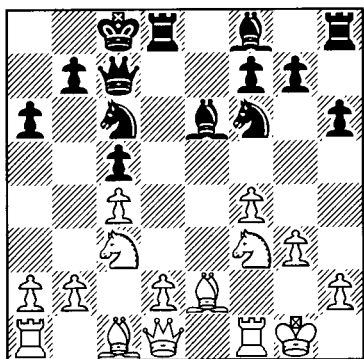
Returning to by far White's main move, 3 exd5:

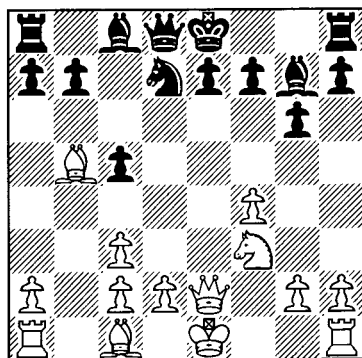
3...♘f6!

Black can also simply recapture on d5, but the vigorous text, first popularized by the game W.Hartston-M.Tal, Tallinn 1979, was responsible for driving away from 2 f4 many of the early leading Grand Prix exponents, including Hebden and Hodgson.

4 ♗b5+

White's most popular choice, developing the bishop before defending the extra pawn, but there are two important alternatives:

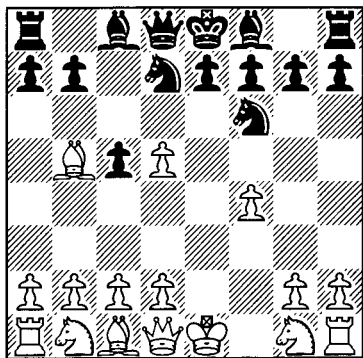
a) 4 c4 e6 5 dxe6 ♗xe6 6 ♘f3 ♘c6 is reminiscent of the Icelandic Gambit (1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♘f6 3 c4 e6). Just as there, Black's pressure down the central files and activity gives him good compensation for the pawn.

Play often continues 7 d3 (unfortunately for White it's not possible to lash out: 7 d4? ♘xd4 8 ♘xd4 ♕xd4 9 ♕xd4 cxd4 10 ♗d3 ♘d7! left him seriously worse in J.Hodgson-V.Salov, Leningrad 1983) 7...♗e7 8 ♗e2 0-0 9 0-0 ♕d7 10 ♘c3 (White's last few moves are quite interchangeable) 10...♖ad8 and now White should avoid the fairly common mistake 11 ♗e3?! ♘g4 12 ♗d2 ♘d4 when Black has more than enough for the pawn. Better is 11 ♔h1 ♕c7 12 ♕b3 b6 which was quite unclear in G.Gudbrandsen-E.Gullaksen, Oslo 2006; White's position is quite grim, but he does have an extra pawn to suffer for. Many readers may well be happy to centralize thus as Black, but a fighting alternative is to quickly castle queenside.

Returning to 6...♘c6, this plan was well illustrated by the game D.Marshall-G.Orlov, Seattle 1990: 7 ♗e2 (probably the most accurate move order since 7 ♘c3 ♕c7 8 d3 0-0-0 awkwardly attacks c4; then 9 ♘b5 ♕e7 is promising as is 9 ♕a4 a6! 10 ♗e2 ♗d6 when Black either regains the pawn with a good game or induces the rather weakening 11 g3) 7...♕c7 8 0-0 (subsequently White has tried to avoid castling, but the alternative 8 d3 remains rather uncharted; Black does, though, appear to have quite reasonable compensation with, for example, 8...0-0-0 9 ♘a3 a6 10 ♗d2 ♗d6 11 g3 h5! 12 ♗c3 h4 giving him good counterplay in M.Uritzky-A.Mironenko, Simferopol 1986, while 9 ♕a4 might be met by 9...♗d7!? as well as by 9...♗f5 10 0-0 ♗xd3 11 ♗xd3 ♖xd3 12 ♘c3 and now 12...a6 would have been about equal in M.Ceranic-D.Kontic, Herceg Novi 2005) 8...0-0-0 9 ♘c3 a6! (it makes sense to keep White out of b5 and thereby on the defensive) 10 g3 h6

11 a3 ♘d4 12 ♘xd4 cxd4 13 ♘d5 and now Orlov might simply have regained his pawn, but he actually preferred to continue aggressively with 13...♗xd5 14 cxd5 h5!?.

b) 4 ♘c3 is an idea which often goes unmentioned by theory, but is White's best way of ensuring himself an equal game should he not wish to pawn-grab and then suffer. After 4...♘xd5 5 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 6 ♕f3 ♕e6+ (Black can also keep the queens on with Sax's 6...♕d6!?) 7 ♕e3 ♘c6 8 ♘f3 g6 9 ♗b5 ♕xe3+ 10 dxe3 ♗d7 the position was certainly quite level in V.Hort-P.Cramling, Roquebrune 1998. White can also play more ambitiously with Plaskett's favourite 5 ♘f3!? when P.Neuman-R.Kalod, Czech League 2001, demonstrated a simple way for Black to continue: 5...♘xc3 (brave souls can also consider 5...♘xf4!? 6 d4 ♘d5 7 ♗c4 ♘xc3 8 bxc3 e6 9 0-0 ♗e7 when White evidently has some compensation, but just how much is not apparent; what is apparent is that White needs to improve on H.Zoedl-C.Laurent, correspondence 1998: 10 ♘e5 0-0 11 ♕g4 ♘c6 12 ♗h6 ♗f6 13 ♖ad1?! cxd4! 14 cxd4 ♘xe5 15 dxe5 ♕b6+ 16 ♔h1 ♗xe5 and Black was rewarded for his accurate defence) 6 bxc3 g6 7 ♗b5+ (critical; 7 ♘e5 ♗g7 8 ♗b5+ ♘d7 9 ♕f3 ♕c7 10 0-0 0-0 was fine for Black in K.Novacek-V.Koutecky, Plzen 1999) 7...♘d7!? 8 ♕e2 ♗g7

9 ♗a3 0-0! (consistent with Black's 7th, this Grünfeldesque concept gives Black the bishop-pair and some pressure for his pawn) 10 ♗xd7 ♕xd7 11 ♗xc5 ♕f5 and now the meek 12 ♕e3 ♕xc2 saw Black regain his pawn, but even 12 ♕xe7 ♗d7 13 0-0 ♖fe8 14 ♕g5 ♕xc2 would have left him with good activity and full compensation.

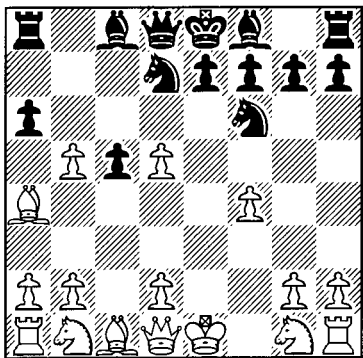
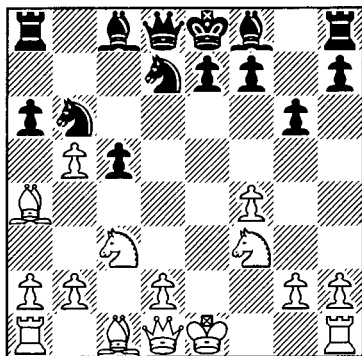
Returning to 4 ♗b5+:

4...♘bd7!?

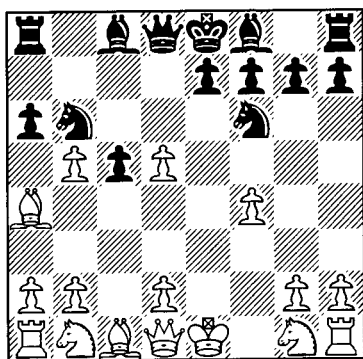
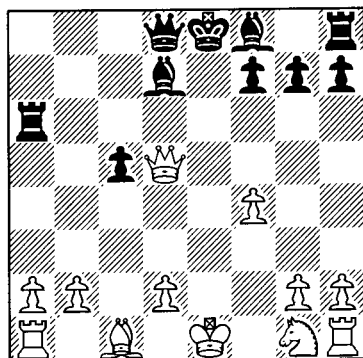
Black more often prefers 4...♗d7 5 ♗xd7+ ♕xd7 6 c4 e6, as indeed Tal did, when he also gains good play for his pawn. However, the resulting play can be quite forcing and it's probably safe to assume that 2 f4 players are no longer stumbling unaware into this position. The text is less worked out and offers Black a good opportunity for some fighting and creative play.

5 c4

The only way to challenge Black. Instead 5 d4 ♘xd5 6 c4 ♘c7 (Yermolinsky) merely leaves White struggling and Black is rather comfortable after 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e2 (or 6 ♗xd7+?! ♕xd7 7 ♕f3 b5 – Yermolinsky – and Black regains his pawn on d5 with advantage) 6...♘b6 7 ♘f3 ♘bxd5 8 ♘xd5 ♘xd5.

5...a6 6 ♗xd7+

Practice has shown that ceding the bishop-pair is pretty essential. White's problem is that 6 ♗a4?! b5! gains further time against his bishop. Indeed he has scored quite terribly after 7 cxb5 when Black has a choice of riches:

a) 7...♘xd5 8 ♘f3 (it feels like just about every legal alternative has been tried here, but few with any success: for example, 8 ♕f3 ♘7b6 9 ♘c3 e6 prepares to capture on a4 with an excellent game; 8 ♘c3 ♘b4! 9 ♘f3 ♘d3+ 10 ♔f1 c4 11 bxa6 ♖xa6! 12 ♗b5 ♕c7! 13 ♗xa6 ♗xa6 was a strong exchange sacrifice for a bind and the initiative in H.Kallio-A.Pyhala, Helsinki 1997; and 8 bxa6?! ♘b4! also gives Black superb activity for his pawn with L.Jen-L.Abreu, correspondence 1994, quickly becoming a rout after 9 ♗c2 ♗xa6 10 a3 ♗d3 11 ♗xd3 ♘xd3+ 12 ♔f1 ♕b8 13 ♘e2? c4!) 8...g6 (Black should be more interested in developing rapidly than in regaining his pawn) 9 ♘c3 ♘5b6!

10 d4 (an understandable bid for some play, but this may actually only make matters worse for White) 10...♘xa4 11 ♕xa4 ♗g7 12 ♗e3?! (as pointed out by Yrjola, White should prefer 12 dxc5 ♘xc5 13 ♕c4 ♘d3+ 14 ♔e2 ♘xc1+ 15 ♖axc1, although, like Gallagher, I still prefer Black; for example, 15...axb5 16 ♕xb5+ ♗d7 17 ♕d3 ♕b8 18 ♖hd1 ♗f5 and Black's bishops

rule the board) 12...♘b6 13 ♕a5 0-0 gave Black a monstrous initiative in J.Hodgson-J.Yrjola, Tallinn 1987; he threatens both 14...axb5 and 14...♘c4, and after 14 0-0-0 axb5 15 ♕xb5 ♗a6! Hodgson quickly collapsed in the face of such strong pressure.

b) 7...♘b6!? (more speculative, less explored and also great fun!)

8 bxa6+ (or 8 ♘c3 ♘xa4 9 ♘xa4 axb5 10 ♘xc5 ♕xd5 11 ♕f3 ♗g4! 12 ♕xd5 ♘xd5 13 d4 ♘b4 and Black had more than enough for the pawn in D.Kulik-K.Schnalzger, Crailsheim 2000; here White prefer 9 ♕xa4, but then Black retains full compensation after 9...♘xd5 or even 9...♗d7 10 ♕c4 axb5 11 ♘xb5 e6!? 12 dxe6 ♗xe6 13 ♕e2 ♗e7) 8...♘xa4 9 ♕xa4+ ♗d7 10 ♕c4 e6 11 ♘c3?! (rightly criticized by Razuvaev who felt that White had to contest the position after 11 dxe6 ♗xe6 12 ♕e2 ♗e7; trying to accurately assess this untested position is almost impossible, but after, say, 13 ♘f3 0-0 14 0-0 c4 15 ♘c3 ♖xa6 Black's strong bind provides fair compensation for the two pawns, while 14...♗c8!? is another possibility) 11...exd5! (seizing the initiative and this was Razuvaev's suggested improvement over the 11...♗d6 of W.Watson-Y.Razuvaev, London 1986) 12 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 13 ♕xd5 ♖xa6 gives Black a strong initiative for his two pawns.

Razuvaev's analysis continues 14 ♘f3 ♖e6+ 15 ♔f2 ♖e2+! 16 ♔f1 (and not 16 ♔g3? ♖xg2+!, winning the white queen after 17 ♔xg2 ♗h3+ 18 ♔xh3 ♕xd5) 16...♗b5 17 ♕xd8+ ♔xd8 18 d3 ♗xd3 19 ♔g1 c4 and here he felt that Black was somewhat better, an assessment later borne out by the game V.Varkentin-E.Krassilnikov, Orsk 2001. This variation is an especially brutal demonstration of the initiative which White can easily find himself facing after 6 ♗a4?! b5!, but in any case his serious light-square weaknesses will always give Black plenty of opportunities.

Returning to the safer 6 ♗xd7+:

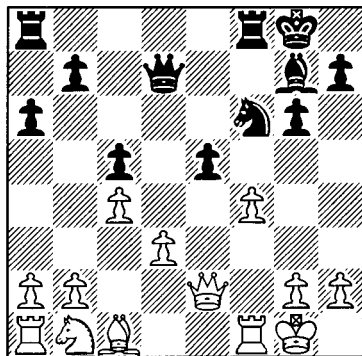
6...♗xd7 7 ♘f3

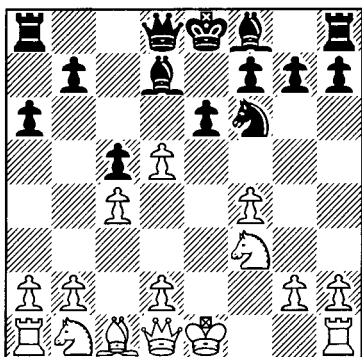
Once again we have some less critical alternatives:

a) 7 ♘c3 e6 8 ♕e2 (pinning the e-pawn is White's only real try for the advantage; instead 8 ♕f3?! exd5 9 ♘xd5

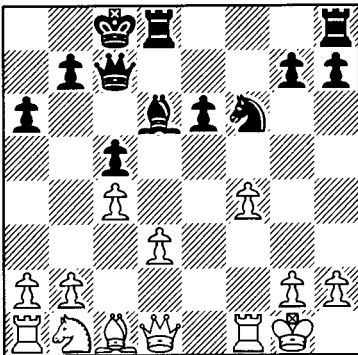
♘xd5 10 ♕xd5?! ♕h4+ 11 ♔d1 0-0-0 12 ♕g5 ♕f2 was fairly horrendous for White in A.Kulikov-Y.Nepomniashchy, Kirishi 2006, but he might consider 8 ♘f3, although after 8...exd5 9 cxd5 ♗e7 10 0-0 0-0 followed by ...b5, Black should be able to regain his pawn with a good game) 8...♗e7 9 dxe6 ♗xe6 10 ♘f3 transposes to the note to White's 10th move, below.

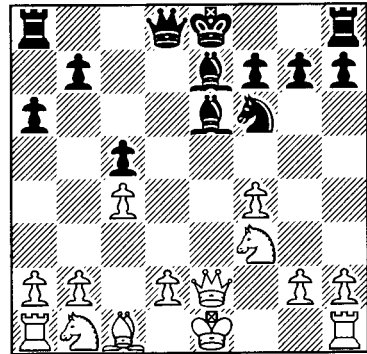
b) 7 d4?! is the move White would really like to make work, but after 7...cxd4 8 ♕xd4 e6 he is falling further behind in development and 9 ♘e2 (Black also has good play after 9 ♘c3 ♖c8; for example, 10 ♗e3 ♗c5 11 ♕d3 ♗xe3 12 ♕xe3 0-0 regained the pawn with advantage in O.Khalikian-A.Vitolinsh, Yerevan 1981) 9...exd5 10 cxd5 ♕a5+ 11 ♘bc3 ♗c5 12 ♕e5+? ♔f8 was already quite disastrous for White in Cannings-J.Gallagher, Bradford 1986.

c) 7 ♕e2 attempts to prevent Black from recapturing on e6 with his bishop. It is actually possible to play 7...e6 8 dxe6 fxe6 followed by 9...♗d6, but Black might prefer to switch plans with 7...g6!? 8 ♘f3 ♗g7, intending to only break with ...e6 or ...b5 having first developed the kingside. This is quite a reasonable approach since both Black's bishop-pair and White's structural weaknesses supply long-term compensation: for example, 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♘e5 (critical; White might also develop with 10 d3, but with 10...e6 11 dxe6 ♗xe6 Black retains good compensation and she shortly regained her pawn after 12 ♗e3 ♖e8 13 ♘e5 ♘d7! in N.Polivoda-N.Popova, Minsk 2004) 10...e6 11 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 12 dxe6 fxe6 (despite the exchanges, Black stands quite well due to his lead in development and ability to open the centre) 13 d3 e5!

14 ♘c3 (the pawn was immune: 14 fxe5? ♘g4 leaves White in huge trouble on the kingside and dark squares, while a crushing check on d4 is threatened after 14 ♕xe5? ♖ae8 15 ♕xc5 ♘g4) 14...♖ae8 15 fxe5 ♘g4 and Black had a strong initiative in J.Wundahl-P.Janous, correspondence 2000.

7...e6

8 ♕e2

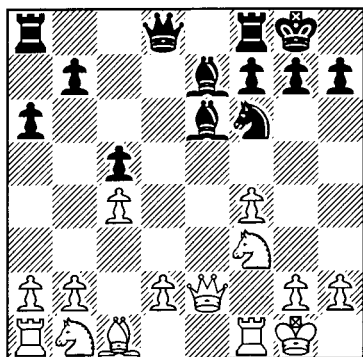
An important alternative is 8 dxe6 ♗xe6 9 d3 (9 ♕e2 transposes to the

main line), but Black has good compensation in any case. Here 9...♗d6!? (taking advantage of White's move order to activate the dark-squared bishop; Black can also play as in our main line with 9...♗e7 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♘c3 ♗f5 and after 12 ♘e5 ♗d6 13 ♕f3 ♖e8 14 ♔h1 ♕c7 the position was roughly balanced in the game V.Zhuravliov-M.Krasenkow, Blagoveshchensk 1988) 10 0-0 (with Black's bishop already on d6, an early ♘e5 no longer convinces; for example, 10 ♕e2 0-0 11 ♘e5? ♖e8 12 0-0 ♗f5 and Black regained his pawn with advantage in V.Rut-E.Heide, correspondence 2000) 10...♕c7!? (preparing to go long and I prefer this bold approach to 10...0-0 11 ♘c3 ♕c7 when 12 ♘g5! isn't so bad for White) 11 ♘g5 (this wins back a bishop, but at the cost of an important kingside defender; in practice White has been keen to avoid the weakening 11 g3 since after 11...0-0-0 12 ♘c3 ♗h3 13 ♖f2 ♖he8 he is pretty weak on the light squares) 11...0-0-0 12 ♘xe6 fxe6

13 ♘c3 ♖hf8 (supporting ...e5; the problem with the immediate 13...e5?! being 14 ♘e4! ♘xe4 15 dxe4 exf4 16 ♗xf4 ♗xf4 17 ♕g4+) 14 ♗e3 e5 is a slightly unusual handling of the black pieces, but still quite an effective one. Black's pressure down the d-file and the b8-h2 diagonal gives him sufficient compensation, and after 15 ♕f3 exchanges and an early draw soon followed in G.Monaville-A.Poulsen, correspondence 1989. Should that not be to a very ambitious player's taste, Black can always prefer the less-forcing 9...♗e7.

8...♗e7 9 dxe6 ♗xe6

10 0-0

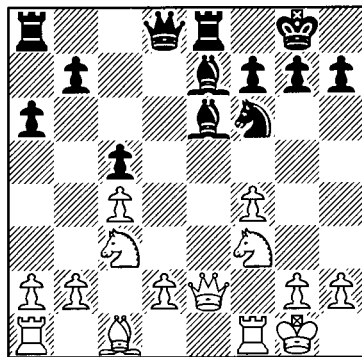
Play transposes after 10 ♘c3 0-0 (Black might also take advantage of White's move order with 10...♗f5!?: 11 ♘e5 0-0 12 0-0 ♕d4+ 13 ♕e3 ♖ad8 14 ♘e2?! ♕xe3+ 15 dxe3 ♘e4 left White struggling to complete his development in E.Bhend-W.Zugrav, correspondence 2002, and 12 d3 ♗d6 13 ♗e3 ♖e8 14 0-0-0 ♗xe5 15 fxe5 ♖xe5 16 ♕d2 b5 also turned out well for Black in N.Shyam-P.Thipsay, Mumbai 2006) 11 0-0 and White should prefer that to 11 ♘e5?! which saw Black generate strong

pressure with 11...♘d7 (as ever the e5-knight should be swiftly challenged) 12 b3 ♘xe5 13 fxe5 b5! 14 d3 ♕d7 15 ♗b2 ♖fd8 in S.Lazzeri-A.Yermolinsky, Alexandria 1996.

10...0-0

11 ♘c3

White can also use the move order 11 d3 ♗f5 12 ♘c3, although a few sources have suggested that he might prefer here 12 ♘e5 which was once used by Sveshnikov. However, after 12...♗d6 (perhaps even better is 12...♘d7!? when White might have nothing better than to retract his last move since 13 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 14 ♘c3 ♗xd3 15 ♖d1 ♖ad8! 16 ♖xd3? ♕xd3 17 ♕xe7 ♖fe8 18 ♕h4 ♕d4+ gives Black a crushing initiative) 13 ♕f3 ♖e8 14 ♘c3 ♗xe5 15 fxe5 ♕d4+ 16 ♗e3?! (White has better chances to equalize with 16 ♔h1; for example, 16...♖xe5 17 ♗g5 ♕xd3 18 ♕xb7 supplies sufficient counterplay) 16...♕xe5 17 ♕xf5 ♕xe3+ 18 ♔h1 ♖e5 one suspects that it was chiefly Sveshnikov's higher rating which persuaded Black to offer a draw in E.Sveshnikov-K.Kiik, Gausdal 1992; d3 remains pretty weak and Black has a pleasant edge.

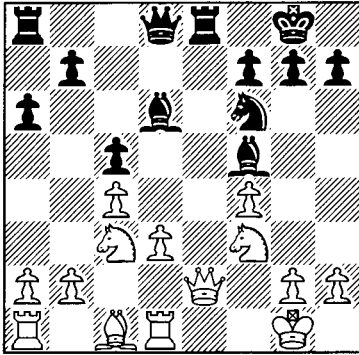
11...♖e8!

More accurate than 11...♗f5 since the vis-à-vis down the e-file gives Black some useful extra options.

12 d3

Once again 12 ♘e5?! is something of a misguided leap and 12...♘d7! 13 ♔h1 (or 13 d3 ♘xe5 14 fxe5 ♕d4+ 15 ♕e3 ♖ad8 – Raetsky – and d3 will fall, leaving Black slightly better) 13...♘xe5 14 fxe5 ♕d4 15 b3 ♖ad8 16 ♕e4 ♖d7 17 ♕xd4 ♖xd4 18 ♖e1 (V.Zhuravliov-A.Yermolinsky, Blagoveshchensk 1988) 18...♖ed8! leaves White, despite the exchange of queens, badly tied down; for example, 19 ♘e4 ♗f5 20 ♘g3 ♗g6 21 ♘f1 b5! (Yermolinsky) sees Black retain excellent compensation for the pawn.

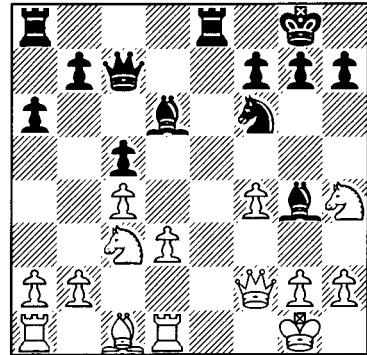
White has also been known to try 12 ♖e1?!, but now 12...♗d6! (12...♗f5 13 ♘e5 ♗d6 14 ♕f2 ♘d7 15 d3! ♗xe5 16 fxe5 ♗xd3 17 ♕g3 gave White reasonable counterplay in E.Pessi-M.Parligras, Predeal 2006; however, this game actually arose via the less

accurate move order 11...♗f5 12 ♖e1 ♖e8) regains the pawn with a good game after 13 d3 ♗xc4 or 13 ♘e5 ♗xe5 14 fxe5 ♘g4 15 ♘d5 f6! 16 d3 ♘xe5.

12...♗f5 13 ♖d1 ♗d6

Black retains plenty of compensation. Indeed in practice White usually looks for a way to return the pawn and thereby free his position with some exchanges. That policy may not, however, be enough for him to equalize:

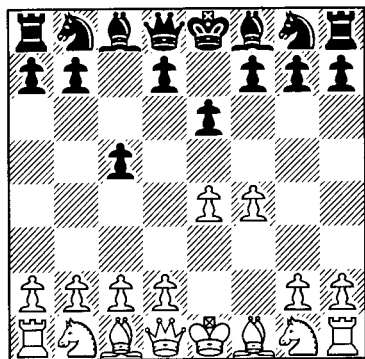
a) 14 ♘e4? (panic) 14...♘xe4 15 dxe4 ♖xe4 16 ♗e3 ♕e7 17 ♕d2 ♖d8 18 ♗f2 left Black much better in R.Mycroft-R.Palliser, York 2005, and now one of many good continuations is 18...♖xc4 19 ♗h4 f6 20 ♖e1?! ♗xf4 21 ♖xe7 ♗xd2 with a winning endgame.

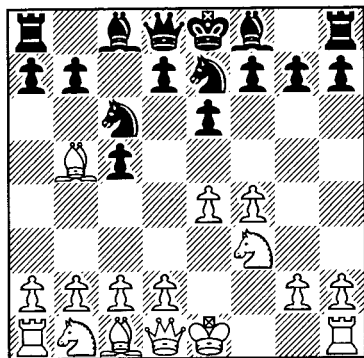
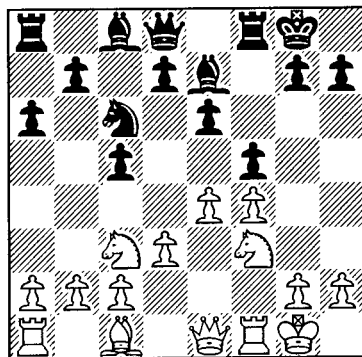
b) 14 ♕f1 ♕c7 15 d4!? (or 15 ♘e5?! ♗xe5 16 fxe5 ♕xe5 17 ♗f4 ♕d4+ 18 ♕f2 ♖ad8 and d3 didn't last much longer in M.Pons Morro-E.Rodriguez Guerrero, Sanxenxo 2003) 15...cxd4 16 ♘xd4 ♗c5 17 ♔h1 ♗xd4! 18 ♖xd4 ♖ad8 19 ♖xd8 ♕xd8 20 b3 ♕d4 21 ♗b2 ♕d2 saw Black retain a powerful initiative in A.Gillen-K.Kiik, Debrecen 1992.

c) 14 ♕f2 (relatively best) 14...♕c7 15 ♘h4 (White can also save the pawn with 15 g3, but this further weakens his light squares; a factor Black was quick to exploit with 15...♖ad8 16 ♘h4 ♗h3 17 b3 ♗e7! 18 ♘f3 ♘g4 19 ♕c2 ♗f6 in M.Welti-A.Predel, correspondence 2000) 15...♗g4

16 ♖f1 ♗e6 (16...♗d7!? 17 h3 b5 is another way of handling the black position) 17 ♗d2 ♖ad8 18 h3 ♗e7 19 f5! ♗d7 20 ♗f4 ♗d6 21 ♘e2 ♗c6 was unclear in K.Kling-A.De Groot, correspondence 1998; Black's long-term compensation due to White's weaknesses persists into any ending.

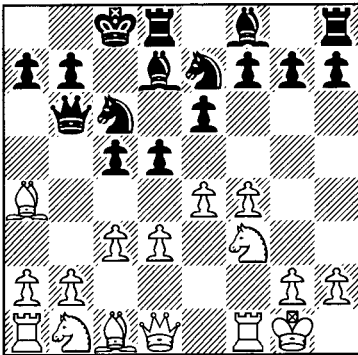
I must admit that prior to working on this section, it was a few years since I looked at this variation, but White has found few new ideas in the interim. Quite simply 4...♘bd7 remains a dangerous weapon and should any Grand Prix players continue to persist with a 2 f4 move order, I suspect they would do well to consider the unclear alternatives to 4 ♗b5+.

B2)

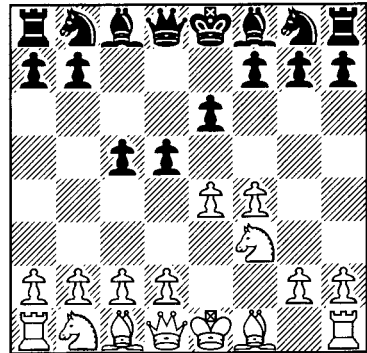
1 e4 c5 2 f4 e6

3 ♘f3 d5

Expanding in the centre, just as Black does in Line A2 and indeed play may transpose. A good alternative, depending on how Black likes to meet 2 ♘c3 and 3 f4, is 3...♘c6 4 ♗b5 (4 ♘c3 is actually a more popular choice, reaching Line A1) 4...♘ge7 when the inclusion of f4 doesn't appear to give White an improved Rossolimo. Indeed Black is quite comfortable here, as shown by a quick round-up of the key lines:

a) 5 0-0 (the most popular continuation) 5...a6 6 ♗xc6 (both Larsen and Miles have preferred to retain the bishop-pair with 6 ♗e2, but it's hard to believe this isn't just an attempt to play chess, rather than a legitimate try for the advantage; following 6...d5 7 e5 ♘f5 8 c3 h5! 9 a4 g6 10 ♘a3 ♗e7 11 ♘c2 ♘a5 Black had good play in M.Al Modiahki-K.Sakaev, Doha 1993, and even the slightly superior 7 d3 is no more than roughly balanced after 7...g6 8 c3 ♗g7 9 ♘a3 0-0 10 ♕e1 b5, as in H.Mas-Wu Shaobin, Ho Chi Minh City 2003) 6...♘xc6 7 ♘c3 (or 7 d3 ♗e7 when 8 ♘c3 transposes, while 8 c4 0-0 9 ♘c3 ♖b8 10 a4 ♘b4! 11 b3 d5 gave Black good counterplay in A.Arulis-A.Kashlyak, correspondence 2002) 7...♗e7 8 d3 (White might also develop with 8 b3 0-0 9 ♗b2, but then Black has a number of reasonable options, including 9...d5 and 9...b6!?, retaining central flexibility for the time being) 8...0-0 9 ♕e1 (another system of development is illustrated by 9 ♗d2 d6 10 ♘e2 b5 11 ♔h1 ♗b7 12 ♕e1 a5! 13 ♕g3 b4 which gave Black typical and effective Sicilian queenside play in B.Lugo-R.Martin del Campo, Holguin 1989) 9...f5!

(we've already seen this idea in certain variations within Line A1; here the

advance is quite effective, holding White up on the kingside and asking him just what his plan now is) 10 ♔h1 (already a possible sign of indecision; Martin feels that White should prefer 10 ♕g3, although this is hardly a try for the advantage; his analysis continues with the sensible 10...b6 and 11...♗b7 which is fine for Black, as is the more ambitious 10...d5!? 11 exd5 exd5 12 ♘e5 ♖e8, followed by ...♗f6 after which White will lose control of e5 and a complex position arises) 10...b6 11 ♗e3 ♗b7 12 e5?! (opening up the long diagonal for Black's extra light-squared bishop cannot be wise) 12...♔h8 13 ♗g1 g5! gave Black the initiative and good prospects in M.Smink-E.L'Ami, Vlissingen 2006.

b) 5 c3 d5 6 d3 (Black can also respond actively to 6 e5, as he did with 6...♗d7 7 ♗a4 d4! 8 ♗c2 ♘d5 9 g3 c4!? in Z.Nikolic-M.Matulovic, Tivat 1994) 6...♗d7 7 ♗a4 ♕b6 8 0-0 0-0-0!?

9 ♔h1 h6 10 ♘a3 was seen in E.Bhend-A.Sokolov, Basel 2007, when Black should play either the prophylactic 10...♔b8!?, followed by ...♘c8, or 10...♘g6, whereas 10...f6 11 ♗e3 g5?! was a little too ambitious after 12 b4! in the game.

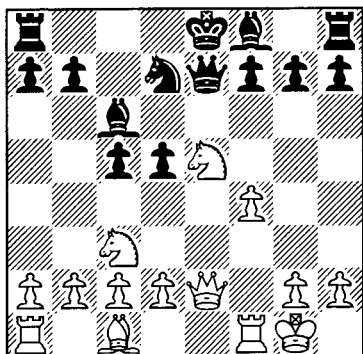
c) 5 b3 is an offbeat idea of Sikora Lerch's, probably best met by 5...♕c7!?, exploiting the undefended f-pawn. Following 6 0-0 a6 7 ♗xc6 ♘xc6 it's not so easy for White to defend f4 (8 d3 ♗e7 is quite comfortable for Black). Here 8 ♗b2!? ♕xf4! 9 ♘e5 ♕xe4 10 ♘xf7 ♖g8 11 ♘c3 is rather speculative with 11...♕g6 12 ♕e1 ♗e7 13 ♘a4 b5 14 ♘b6 ♖b8 15 ♘xc8 ♖xc8 leaving White struggling in J.Sikora Lerch-L.Ftacnik, Frenstat 1982, although perhaps this sacrifice isn't so clear as White was happy to later repeat this line.

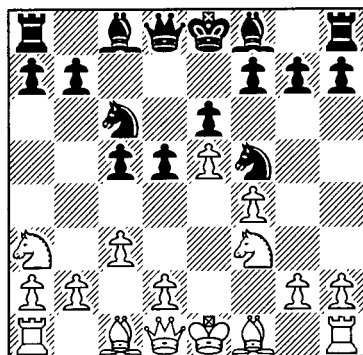
Returning to 3...d5:

4 ♗b5+

The most active development for White's king's bishop. It does, though, enable Black to free his position through the forthcoming exchange and so White has also tried:

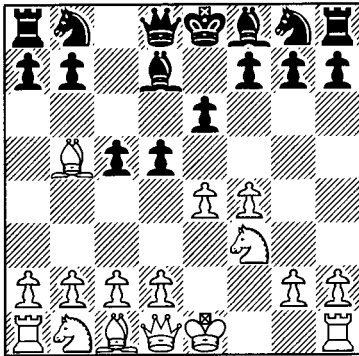
a) 4 ♘c3 can be met, according to taste, by either 4...♘c6 or 4...dxe4, transposing to Line A1 or Line A2 respectively.

b) 4 exd5 exd5 5 ♗b5+ ♗d7 can serve

as another route into our main line after 6 ♗xd7+ ♕xd7, but White also has 6 ♕e2+, not that this is of much use after 6...♕e7 (prudent; 6...♗e7 7 0-0 ♗xb5 8 ♕xb5+ ♕d7 might look like a decent alternative, but it's not actually so easy to equalize here especially because of 9 ♘c3 ♘c6 10 ♘e5 ♘xe5 11 fxe5 d4 12 ♕b3!, a powerful discovery of Sikora Lerch's) 7 ♘e5 ♘c6 (7...a6 is a good alternative, albeit also far from exciting); for example, 8 ♘c3 ♘f6 9 ♗xc6 (9 ♘xd7 ♕xe2+ 10 ♘xe2 ♔xd7 is fine for Black too) 9...♗xc6 10 0-0 ♘d7

11 ♘xc6 (White might be more adventurous with 11 ♘b5!?, although Black is fine after 11...♗xb5 12 ♕xb5 0-0-0 and 11...♘xe5!? 12 fxe5 ♕d7, intending 13 ♘d6+ ♗xd6 14 exd6+ ♕e6 15 ♕xe6+ fxe6 followed by ...♔d7, may well also be possible) 11...♕xe2 12 ♘xe2 bxc6 13 b3 ♘b6 14 ♗a3 and J.Sikora Lerch-G.Sax, Warsaw 1979, was agreed drawn before Black liquidated his doubled pawns with ...c4.

c) 4 e5 ♘c6 5 c3 (this unusual position can also arise from 2 f4 in the French) 5...♘h6 6 ♘a3 (best, whereas 6 d4?! has long been known from the French Advance as being too ambitious, since 6...♕b6 leaves White short of a good move; for example, 7 ♕b3 cxd4 8 ♕xb6 axb6 9 cxd4 ♘f5, forcing 10 ♗b5 ♗d7 11 ♗xc6 bxc6 when Black has all the trumps) 6...♘f5

7 ♘c2 h5!? (hardly the only approach; 7...♗d7 8 ♗d3 ♗e7 9 0-0 ♘h4 10 ♗e2 ♘xf3+ 11 ♗xf3 0-0 12 ♕e2 f6, for example, is also fine for Black, V.Komliakov-L.Psakhis, Yerevan Olympiad 1996) 8 g3 ♗d7 9 d3 b5 10 ♗h3 g6 11 0-0 ♕b6 gave Black good counterplay in V.Bologan-V.Burmakin, Istanbul 2003.

d) 4 d3 hopes for a queenless middlegame. Black might be happy to oblige, but he doesn't have to with, for example, 4...♘c6 5 c3 ♗e7 (note the delay in playing ...♘f6, thereby taking any sting out of e4-e5 since Black can then bring a knight to f5) 6 ♗e2 ♘h6!? 7 ♘e5 ♘xe5 8 fxe5 ♗h4+! 9 g3 ♗g5 10 h4 ♗xc1 11 ♕xc1 0-0 12 ♘a3 ♗d7 wasn't at all clear, but Black certainly enjoyed both the safer king and the option of the ...f6-break in a rare high-level example, A.Morozevich-A.Grischuk, Wijk aan Zee 2005.

4...♗d7

5 ♗xd7+ ♕xd7

A more popular alternative is 5...♘xd7, but luring White's knight forwards is the easiest way for Black to fully equalize. We saw a similar idea in the note to White's 5th in Line A2 and just as there, White's problem is that his advanced knight will be exchanged off.

6 ♘e5

The only real try to trouble Black, not that it succeeds. White can also opt for the move order 6 exd5 exd5 when 7 ♘e5 ♕c7 transposes. Here 7 d4 has occasionally been preferred, but yet again we find f4 not really fitting in with a white anti-IQP set-up: for example, 7...♘f6 8 0-0 ♗e7 has ideas of meeting ♗e3 with ...♘g4, and White's attempt to mix things up with 9 ♘e5 ♕c7 10 ♘c3?! failed to convince after 10...♘c6 11 ♗e3 ♘xd4! 12 ♗xd4 cxd4 13 ♘b5 ♕b6 when Black was already pretty active in D.Gavela-C.Ionescu, Bucharest 2001.

6...♕c7 7 exd5 exd5 8 ♘c3

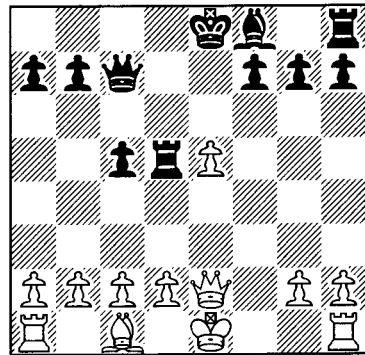
Another possible move order is 8 ♕f3 ♘f6 9 ♘c3, transposing.

8...♘f6 9 ♕f3

At first sight, the attack on d5 looks a little awkward, but Black can neutralize it with a small tactic. Instead 9 0-0 ♗e7 10 ♕f3 is an attempt by White to avoid this tactical defence, but Black is fine after 10...♕d6 since 11 ♕e2 no longer wins a pawn and 11 b3 0-0 12 ♗b2 ♘c6 13 ♘b5 ♕d8 was about equal in L.Kempen-G.Benson, correspondence 2001.

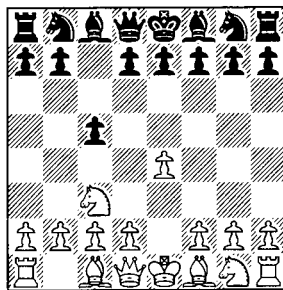
9...♘c6!

Simplest and best as Black initiates a small forcing sequence.

10 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 11 ♕xd5 ♖d8 12 ♕e4 ♖d4 13 ♕e2 ♘xe5 14 fxe5 ♖d5

The point. Black now regains his pawn with full equality; for example, 15 0-0 ♕xe5 16 ♕f2 (16 ♕b5+ ♖d7 invites trouble, such as after 17 ♖xf7 ♕d4+!? 18 ♖f2 ♗d6) 16...♕d4 17 ♖e1+ ♗e7 18 ♕xd4 ♖xd4 19 d3 ♖d7 was shortly agreed drawn in L.Day-J.Adamski, Buenos Aires 1978, and 15 ♕b5+ ♕d7 16 ♕xd7+ ♔xd7 17 0-0 ♔e6 18 b3 ♖xe5 19 ♗b2 ♖e2 twice failed to give Wahls any advantage as White in the mid-nineties.

So long as Black is happy to meet 2 ♘c3 and 3 f4 with an ...e6 set-up, 2 f4 e6 looks like quite an easy neutralizer.

Chapter Five

Other Approaches after 2 ♘c3

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3

We've already studied White's traditional follow-ups to this, namely the Closed Sicilian and the Grand Prix Attack. At club level both of those systems remain pretty popular, but White does have some other options which we must explore after both:

A: 2...♘c6
B: 2...e6

A)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6

We will now chiefly focus on one independent system and two move order devices:

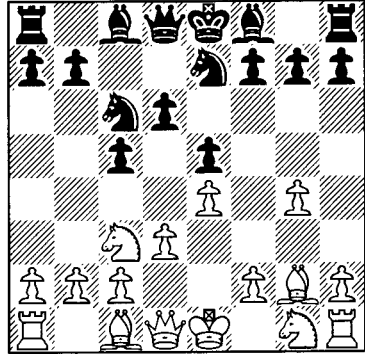
A1: 3 ♗b5
A2: 3 ♘ge2
A3: 3 ♘f3

Also occasionally seen is 3 g4, the so-called Vinohrady variation. This type of extended Closed Sicilian remains quite rare, but may gain some attention from those of offbeat mind after being covered in an *SOS* article. Black has a number of set-ups to choose from, but I especially like 3...e6!?, preparing ...d5 after which g4 may later be revealed as a weakness. Play might continue 4 ♗g2 (usual, but 4 ♘ge2 is also possible; after 4...d5 5 ♘g3 d4 6 ♘ce2 Black settled for the tempting 6...♕h4!? in H.Krausser-W.Schmidt, Bayern 2001; also worth considering is the provocative 6...♘f6, intending 7 h3 c4 and 7 g5 ♘g4!? 8 d3 c4 with good counterplay) and now:

a) 4...♘ge7 5 d3 (suggested by Kavalek and Bosch, whereas 5 f4?! d5 6 e5?! ♘g6 left White rather overextended in O.Chernikov-I.Titenko, USSR 1966) 5...d5 and, slightly surprisingly, this position remains untested which perhaps says as much about the scarcity of the Vinohrady as anything else.

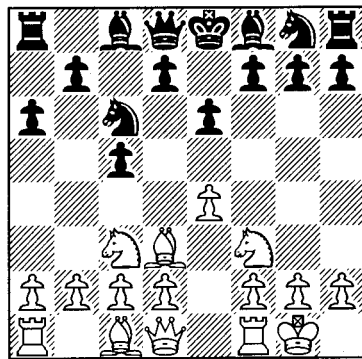
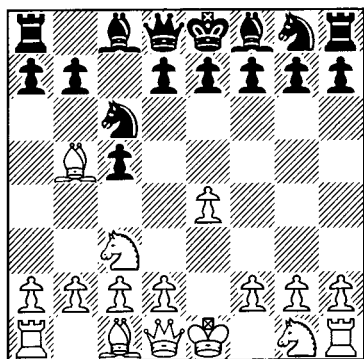
It's not particularly easy for White to develop his king's knight here (6 ♘ge2 is well met by 6...d4 when White's knights end up misplaced), and so he might continue in creative style with 6 h4!?, but this shouldn't bring him any advantage with 6...d4 7 ♘ce2 e5 8 ♘g3 ♘g6 9 g5 h6!? supplying reasonable counterplay for Black.

b) Black might also wish to enter into the general provocative spirit with 4...h5!? as he did in no less a game than V.Hort-S.Kindermann, Bath 1983: 5 gxh5 ♘f6 6 d3 ♖xh5 7 ♘ge2 d5!? (continuing in ambitious vein; 7...d6 is perhaps more prudent) 8 ♘g3 (White might perhaps prefer 8 ♘f4!?, as he did in P.Roth-G.Miniboeck, Wolfsberg 1985: 8...♖e5 9 0-0 dxe4 10 dxe4 ♕xd1 11 ♘xd1 and now I wonder about 11...♘d4 12 ♘e3 ♖xe4!? 13 ♗xe4 ♘xe4 with reasonable play for the exchange due to White's split kingside) 8...♖h8 9 ♗g5 ♗e7 and Black had a fairly comfortable position.

Perhaps in a bid to avoid 3...e6, some crafty Vinohrady players have preferred to begin with the sequence 3 d3 d6 4 g4 (4 g3 would, of course, take play into the Closed Sicilian), but after 4...e5!? (the point behind Black's flexible third) 5 ♗g2 ♘ge7 Black is ready to exploit the weakened f4- and h4-squares.

White must respond energetically, although Black seems to gain a reasonable game in any case: 6 h4!? ♘g6 7 h5 (more recently the similar 7 g5 h6 8 h5 ♘f4 9 ♗xf4 exf4 10 gxh6 ♕g5!? gave Black good counterplay in K.Bischoff-R.Tischbierek, Austrian League 2002) 7...♘f4 8 ♗xf4 exf4 9 ♘d5 g5! 10 hxg6 fxg6 11 ♘xf4 ♗g7 12 c3 ♕g5 13 ♘d5 0-0 gave Black sufficient play for his pawn in D.Suttles-S.Reshevsky, US Championship, New York 1965.

A1)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5

This offbeat variation has been steadily gaining some support over the past decade. White hopes to gain a favourable Rossolimo (his f-pawn isn't obstructed) with an exchange on c6, but of course Black isn't going to allow that.

3...♘d4 4 ♗c4

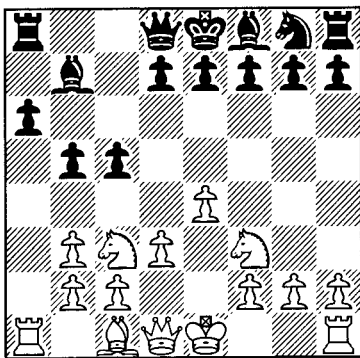
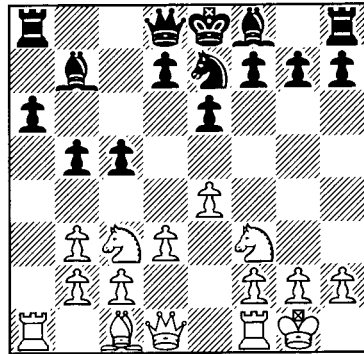
This remains by some way White's most popular choice, but he doesn't have to preserve the bishop. Other possibilities are:

a) 4 ♘f3!? hopes for an exchange on b5 when a quick d4 gives White a useful lead in development. Black should probably avoid that, preferring 4...e6 and thereby reaching a position which also occurs in the Rossolimo (2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 e6 4 ♘c3 ♘d4). Following 5 0-0 (White should avoid 5 ♘xd4?! cxd4 6 ♘e2 due to 6...♕g5! with a nasty double attack: 7 ♘xd4? ♕c5 8 c3 e5 wins a piece and 7 ♗d3 ♕xg2 8 ♘g3 ♕h3 9 b3 ♘e7 10 ♗b2 ♘c6 11 f4 b6 12 ♕e2 ♗b7 13 0-0-0 0-0-0 left White with insufficient compensation for the pawn in R.Colas Longares-A.Kogan, Aragon 2004) 5...a6 6 ♗d3 (standard, since 6 ♗c4?! just loses time to 6...b5, while 6 ♗e2 ♘e7 7 d3 ♘ec6 leaves White struggling for a good plan), I like the cute retreating move 6...♘c6!? (6...♘e7 7 ♘xd4 cxd4 8 ♘e2 d5 is a decent alternative), simply asking White what his plan is.

M.Tseitlin-B.Avrukh, Israeli Championship, Tel Aviv 2002, continued 7 ♖e1 (or 7 ♗e2 when 7...d6 is likely to lead to a Scheveningen after 8 d4 cxd4 9 ♘xd4 ♘f6; likewise 7...♕c7 8 d4 cxd4 9 ♘xd4 is a Taimanov, but Black can also remain in independent vein: 7...g5!? 8 d3 g4 9 ♘e1 h5 10 f3 ♗d6 11 f4 b6 was unclear in V.Baklan-A.Vaisser, Istanbul 2003) 7...g5! (a powerful idea before White regroups with ♗f1 and d4; suddenly White finds his position rather congested) 8 ♔h1 (alternatively, 8 g3 d6 9 b3 ♗g7 10 ♗b2 h6 11 ♗f1 ♘ge7 12 ♖b1 ♘g6 was quite comfortable for Black in G.Souleidis-H.Bousios, Halkidiki 2002, but even worse for White was 8 h3?! h5! 9 ♘h2 ♗d6 10 ♗e2? g4 11 g3 h4 and Black had a crushing attack in S.Fruteau-A.Skripchenko, Chartres 2005) and now Avrukh opted for the calm 8...♗g7 9 ♗f1 h6 10 d3 ♘ge7, but I would prefer to continue in space-gaining style with his later suggestion of 8...g4!? 9 ♘g1 h5, intending 10 f4 ♗h6!.

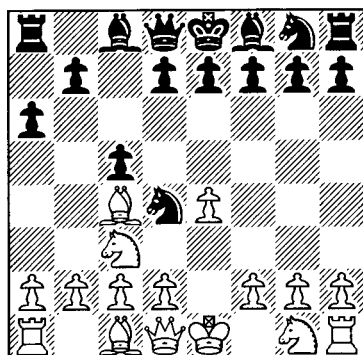
6...♘c6 looks promising and indeed it's been responsible for rather dampening White's interest in 4 ♘f3.

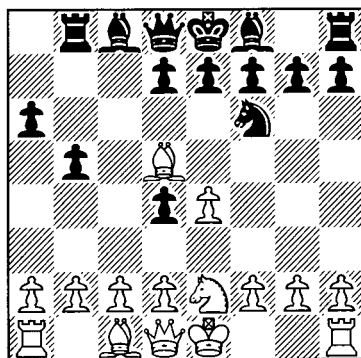
b) 4 a4 e6 5 ♘f3 a6 is once again a sensible approach from Black. After 6 ♗c4 we've transposed to note 'c' to Black's 4th move in our main line, but neither do the alternatives especially convince for White: 6 ♗d3 (or 6 ♗e2 g6!? 7 ♘xd4 cxd4 8 ♘b1 ♗g7 9 0-0 ♘e7 10 d3 0-0 11 ♘d2 ♕c7 12 a5 d5 13 exd5 exd5! with some pressure for Black in J.Barle-D.Pavasovic, Ljubljana 2002; note the cramping influence exerted by the doubled d-pawns) 6...♘c6 7 0-0 is reminiscent of variation 'a'. Indeed Black might well play 7...g5!? here, although in R.Ponomariov-A.Dreev, Spanish Team Championship 2006, he preferred the French-like 7...d5 and after 8 exd5 exd5 9 ♗e2 ♘f6 10 d4 ♗e6 11 ♗e3 cxd4 12 ♘xd4 ♗b4! a balanced IQP situation had arisen.

c) 4 ♗a4 a6 5 d3 b5 6 ♗b3 ♗b7 7 ♘f3 ♘xb3 8 axb3 sees Black logically seizing both space and the bishop-pair, but this position is actually quite unclear since it is not so easy to develop smoothly the black kingside:

8...e6 (those with some Rauzer experience should also consider 8...d6 9 ♗g5 ♘f6!? 10 ♗xf6 gxf6, pitting Black's bishops against White's superior structure; following 11 ♘h4 e6 12 ♕h5! ♕d7 13 0-0 ♗g7 14 ♖fe1 0-0-0! the position remained quite unbalanced and unclear in S.Buckley-M.Chandler, British League 2002) 9 0-0 (Tiviakov turned to this after getting nowhere following 9 e5 d6 10 exd6 ♗xd6 11 ♘e4 ♗e7 12 ♕e2 ♘f6 13 0-0 0-0 with easy play for Black in S.Tiviakov-R.Janssen, Dieren 2001) 9...♘e7!? (as White isn't well placed to spend another tempo opening the centre with d4, I like this Taimanov-like knight manoeuvre to g6, although 9...d6 followed by ...♘f6 is a worthy alternative)

10 ♘g5 (the most direct, preparing to meet 10...♘g6 with 11 f4; White has also tried 10 ♖e1 ♘g6 11 ♗g5, but after 11...♕c7 12 h4?! h6 13 ♗e3 ♗e7 14 h5 ♘f4 15 ♘h2 f5! 16 g3 ♘h3+ 17 ♔g2 ♘g5 Black had promising counterplay in L.Nisipeanu-J.Chabanon, Paris 2002) 10...h6 11 ♘h3 d5! (having driven White's knight to h3, Black changes approach) 12 ♕g4 d4 13 ♘e2 g6 14 ♘g3 ♗g7 15 f4 (not ideal, but White rather

lacks a good follow-up on the kingside) 15...f5! 16 exf5?! exf5 17 ♕e2 0-0 18 ♗d2 ♘d5 left White's knights misplaced and Black with an excellent game in J.Aubel-V.Ikonnikov, Belgian League 2002.

4...e6

Standard, but a promising idea is 4...a6!?, intending to institute a quick ...b5:

a) 5 ♘ge2 b5 6 ♗d3 ♘c6! (a concept we've seen already and here it leaves White's pieces falling over each other) 7 ♘g3 g6 (Black even has time for this desirable double fianchetto) 8 0-0 ♗g7 9 f4 ♗b7 10 a4 b4 11 ♘d5 d6 12 ♖b1 ♘f6 13 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 left Black with a comfortable position and was a success for the rapid ...b5 in A.Ledger-J.Emms, British League 2005.

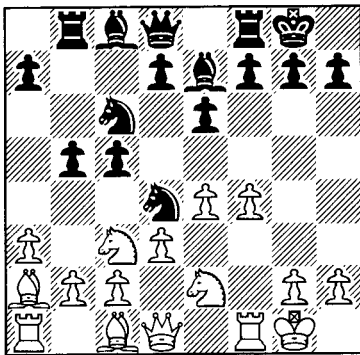
b) 5 ♘f3 b5 6 ♗d5 (this is obviously critical, whereas 6 ♗b3?? is a sleepy, early-in-the-morning move if ever I saw one: 6...♘xf3+ 7 ♕xf3 c4 8 e5 ♖b8 could already have been met with resignation in D.Buckley-A.Jackson, British League 2003) 6...♖b8 7 ♘xd4 cxd4 8 ♘e2 ♘f6!

9 ♘xd4 e6 10 ♗b3 ♘xe4 (Rowson) gives Black a good game due to his solid centre and queenside space.

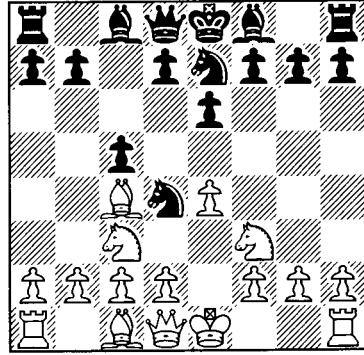
c) Bearing in mind the last two variations, it's puzzling why 4...a6 isn't more popular. Indeed Rowson has suggested that 5 a4 might be White's best, but the inclusion of a4 and ...a6 can only help Black; for example, 5...e6 (Rowson also draws attention to 5...g6!? which might be even better; Black usually can't meet 6 ♘f3 ♗g7 7 ♘xd4 cxd4 8 ♕f3 with 8...e6, but here he can since 9 ♘b5 is clearly impossible) 6 ♘f3 ♘e7 7 ♘xd4 (perhaps 7 0-0 ♘ec6 8 d3 is more prudent here, not that Black was especially troubled after 8...g6 9 ♘xd4 cxd4 10 ♘e2 ♗g7 11 c3 d5! 12 exd5 exd5 13 ♗a2 0-0 in A.Dunnington-J.Rowson, British League 2001) 7...cxd4 8 ♘e2 ♘c6 9 0-0 ♗e7 10 d3 0-0 should be compared with our main line, except that there White rarely wants to both weaken b4 and give extra strength to ...b5 by playing a4.

d) Perhaps the prophylactic 5 ♗b3!? is best after which 5...b5 6 d3 trans-

poses to note 'c' to White's 4th move.

5 ♘f3

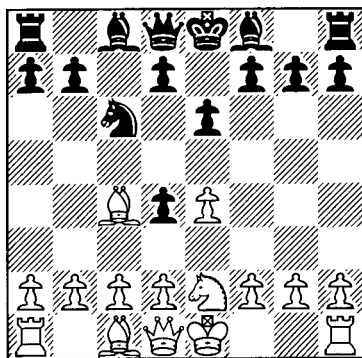
A major alternative is 5 ♘ge2 ♘e7 (just as in our main line, I prefer this to the fashionable 5...♘f6; that may seem out of keeping with our fighting policy, but complex positions like the one arising after 6 0-0 a6 7 d3 b5 8 ♗b3 ♘xb3 9 axb3 ♗b7 and now either 10 f4 or 10 ♗g5 are not that easy to handle, especially against an opponent with some experience of them) and now White should probably transpose to our main line with 6 ♘xd4. The alternative 6 0-0 ♘ec6 is fairly comfortable for Black, as was shown by, for example, 7 d3 (or 7 ♘g3 a6 8 a3 b5 9 ♗a2 h5!? 10 h3 g6 11 d3 ♗g7 12 a4 d6 13 f4 ♖b8 14 axb5 axb5 15 f5 ♗e5! with good counterplay in D.Marholev-M.Popchev, Plovdiv 1999) 7...♗e7 8 f4 0-0 9 a3 ♖b8 10 ♗a2 b5

11 ♘xd4 ♘xd4! (11...cxd4 12 ♘e2 d6 was also possible, but Sutovsky understandably saw no reason not to exploit the option of maintaining a powerful knight on d4) 12 ♘e2 ♘xe2+ 13 ♕xe2 d5 14 e5?! f5! 15 c3 a5 16 ♗e3 b4 and Black, with a sequence of natural moves, gained a rather useful queenside initiative in T.Rendle-E.Sutovsky, Gibraltar 2007.

5...♘e7

Just like the more popular 5...♘f6, this leads to some unbalanced positions and should give Black reasonable chances to play for a win against a weaker opponent. I've always found it easier to handle than 5...♘f6 which remains a reasonable alternative, albeit one which has steadily been accumulating a body of theory.

6 ♘xd4

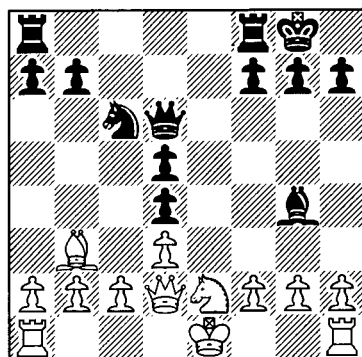
White decides to unbalance the structure. He can also employ the move order 6 0-0 ♘ec6 7 ♘xd4 when 7...cxd4 transposes to our main line, although here 7...♘xd4!? 8 d3 ♗e7 is a decent alternative. White has also tried to delay the exchange of knights, but such a policy risks leaving him short of a good plan and is not too problematic for Black: 7 d3 ♗e7 (Black might also exploit the move order to prefer 7...g6!? after which 8 ♘xd4 cxd4 9 ♘e2 ♗g7 10 ♗d2 0-0 11 b4!? b6 12 b5 ♘e7 13 ♗b4 d6 14 a4 a5! maintained the balance in

B.Spassky-G.Kasparov, Reykjavik 1988) 8 ♗f4?! (unimpressive, whereas White could still reach our main line with 8 ♘xd4 cxd4 9 ♘e2) 8...0-0 9 ♘xd4 (just like Rendle in the note to White's 5th, White is unable after all to find an alternative to this exchange, but now his dark-squared bishop is a little misplaced) 9...cxd4 10 ♘e2 f5!? (an active break which will become more familiar after studying White's various 10th move options in our main line) 11 f3 (or 11 exf5 d5 12 ♗b3 ♖xf5 13 ♗d2 ♗d7 14 ♘g3 ♖f7 15 f4 ♗d6 and Black is fine) 11...♔h8 12 ♗g3 d6 13 c3 dxc3 14 bxc3 ♘a5 15 ♗b3 ♘xb3 16 ♕xb3 e5 gave Black the two bishops and fair counterplay in R.Roszkowski-V.Bologan, Warsaw (rapid) 2005.

6...cxd4 7 ♘e2 ♘c6

8 0-0

Not essential, but the alternatives allow Black some extra options:

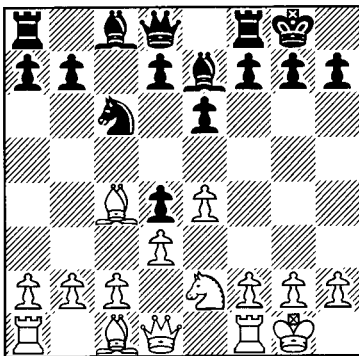
a) 8 c3 ♘e5!? wins the bishop-pair and after 9 d3 ♘xc4 10 dxc4 dxc3 11 ♘xc3 ♕c7 12 ♕d3 a6 the position is about equal, V.Srebrnic-F.Levin, Ljubljana 1993.

b) 8 d3 d5!? (8...♗e7 9 0-0 transposes to our main line; another independent option for Black is the Kasparovesque 8...g6!?) 9 exd5 exd5 10 ♗b3 ♗d6 gives Black good activity in return for the doubled d-pawns. A.Corkett-R.Palliser, British League 2002, continued 11 ♗f4 (this risks leaving White with a blunted b3-bishop against a black knight; 11 ♘f4!? might be an improvement, although 11...♗xf4 12 ♗xf4 ♕e7+ 13 ♕e2 ♕xe2+ 14 ♔xe2 ♗e6 15 ♔d2 ♔d7 16 ♖he1 ♖he8, with the plan of ...f6 and ...♗f7, left Black most certainly not worse in M.Kolmakova-L.Konkova, Serpukhov 2004) 11...0-0 12 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 13 ♕d2 ♗g4!

14 0-0 (alternatively, 14 f3 would have horribly weakened e3 and 14 ♕f4!? ♕b4+ 15 c3 dxc3 16 bxc3 ♕xf4 17 ♘xf4 d4 sees d3 become weak) 14...♗xe2 15 ♕xe2 a5!? 16 a4 ♖ac8 17 ♕f3 ♘b4 18 ♖ac1 ♖c5 and White remained very solid, but Black enjoyed some grinding prospects.

8...♗e7

Probably better than the slightly more common 8...♗c5 after which the

bishop can become a target for White's queenside pawns after c3. However, those who quite like the plan of trying to engineer a knight against blunted b3-bishop scenario (see note 'b' to White's 8th move, above) should also consider 8...d5!?. It seems that White doesn't have a good alternative to 9 exd5 exd5 10 ♗b3 ♗d6 11 d3, after which 11...0-0 12 ♗f4 ♗g4 13 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 14 h3 (E.El Gindy-M.Ezat, Cairo 2003) 14...♗xe2 15 ♕xe2 a5 can be compared with Corkett-Palliser. White shouldn't be worse in such a situation, since he can aim to keep Black tied to the defence of d4 and/or d5, as well as hoping to generate some play down the e-file. However, I'd still rather take Black in such a position: the long-term advantage of playing with knight against bad bishop, or with queen and knight against queen and bishop, should not be underestimated and neither should the possibility that White will find himself badly tied to the defence of c2, as indeed Corkett became.

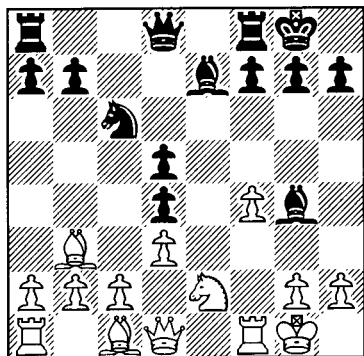
9 d3 0-0

10 a3

The most popular, preparing a retreat square on a2 and dissuading an early ...b5, but whether this is best is not clear. Indeed a number of different approaches have been seen in practice:

a) 10 ♗d2 ♔h8!? (waiting and hoping to meet f4 with ...f5, although Black can probably get away with an immediate 10...f5; compare with our main line) 11 ♗b3 d6 (I would also consider 11...b6!? à la Ikonnikov, below) 12 c3 ♗f6 13 ♖c1 ♗d7 14 cxd4 ♘xd4 15 ♗c3 ♕b6 was pretty level in L.Keitlinghaus-Y.Pelletier, German League 1999; a good example of how hard it can be for White to prove any advantage when Black maintains control of d4.

b) 10 ♗b3 ♔h8!? (Ikonnikov's waiting idea, although once again an immediate 10...f5 11 exf5 ♖xf5 12 ♘g3 ♖f7 13 f4 – preventing Black from using the e5-square, but at the expense of restricting White's other bishop – 13...d5 14 a3 ♗d6 was OK for Black in M.Tissir-S.Barrientos Chavarriaga, Mataro 2005) 11 ♔h1 (White is happy to jockey for position; he later preferred 11 ♘g3 when 11...f5?! 12 exf5 exf5 13 ♘e2! g5?! 14 f4 was rather too ambitious in P.Timagin-V.Belikov, Voronezh 2001, and Black should prefer either 11...b6 or 11...d5!?) 11...b6 12 ♗d2 ♗b7 13 f4 f5 14 exf5 exf5 15 ♘g1 saw this balanced position agreed drawn in B.Kamber-V.Ikonnikov, Zurich 2000; Black can cover d4 and e5 with ...♗f6 and another idea to note is the concept of ...♘a5, allowing further structural decimation in the name of counterplay.

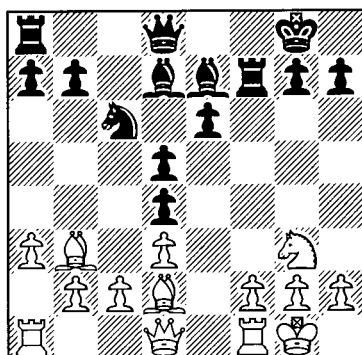
c) 10 f4 d5 (or 10...f5!? – always a

useful move to hold White up on the kingside after f4 – 11 a3 g6 12 b4 a6 13 ♗b2 b5 14 ♗b3 ♗b7 15 ♔h1 a5 and Black had sufficient counterplay in C.Picard-Y.Berthelot, Sautron 2005) 11 exd5 exd5 12 ♗b3 ♗g4

13 h3 ♗xe2 14 ♕xe2 ♕d7 15 ♗d2 a5 16 a4 ♗b4!? 17 ♗xb4 axb4 again left White's bishop quite restricted in O.Steffens-I.Brener, German League 2005.

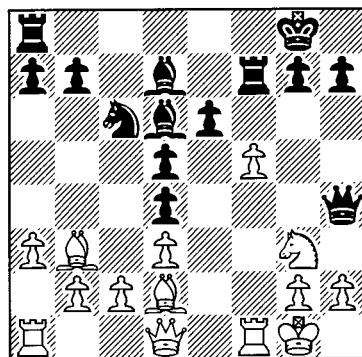
Some readers may find the amount of options given in these notes a little too many, others will find them quite useful. The general view is that unless Black plays an early ...b5, he has a number of ways to reach a reasonable position with two key ideas being ...d5, aiming to blunt White's b3-bishop, and ...f5, either opening lines for counterplay on the kingside or halting White on that side of the board.

10...f5!?

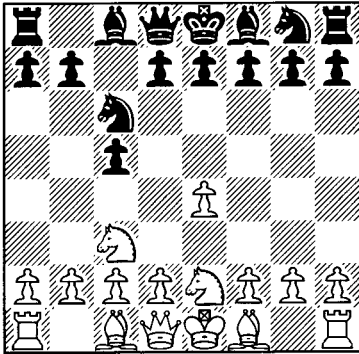
By no means the only approach, but still a useful one to study. Two reasonable alternatives being 10...♔h8 11 f4 d5!? 12 exd5 exd5 13 ♗b3 f5, with rough equality in E.Deutsch-K.Lerner, Tel Aviv 2002, and 10...♗f6 11 ♘g3 d5 12 exd5 exd5 13 ♗a2 ♖e8 14 ♕f3 ♗e6 15 ♘h5 ♗e5 16 ♗f4 ♕h4 which was also fine for Black in B.Vuckovic-F.Handke, Bermuda 2002.

11 exf5 ♖xf5 12 ♘g3 ♖f7 13 ♗d2 d5 14 ♗b3 ♗d7

15 f4

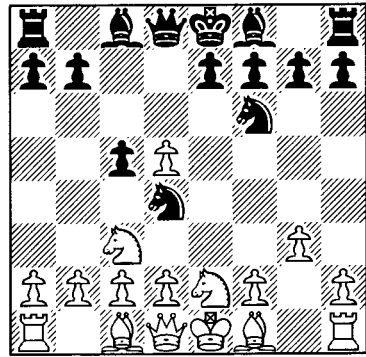
Only with an advance of his f-pawn can White hope to get his light-squared bishop participating once again.

15...♗d6 16 f5 ♕h4!

Both sides have reasonable play and the position was about even in J.Maiwald-F.Handke, German League 2002.

This white system shows no sign of losing any popularity, but does no more than lead to an unbalanced and fairly original game. Indeed Black has a number of reasonable options, including 4...a6!? and the various ways to handle the position after 8...♗e7 and 9...0-0 in our main line.

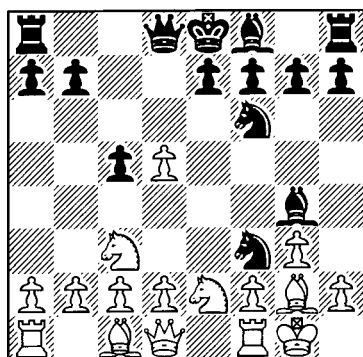
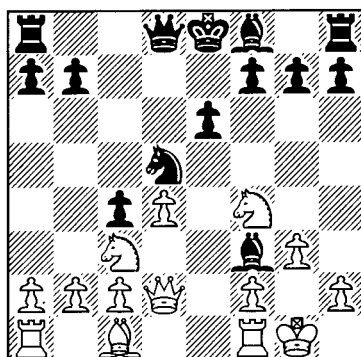
A2)
1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 ♘ge2

This is generally used as a transpositional tool. Indeed after 3...g6, White has nothing better than 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4, reaching an Accelerated Dragon in which he has lost the Maróczy option, or 4 g3 ♗g7 5 ♗g2 d6 and we've transposed to Line A3 of Chapter Three. Likewise 3...d6 can lead to that version of the Closed Sicilian or to a Classical Sicilian after 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 ♘f6. We should note too that 3...e6, the choice of a Taimanov player, is actually discussed via the move order 2...e6 3 ♘ge2 ♘c6 in Line B1, below.

There two other options worth mentioning:

a) 3...♘f6 (hoping for a Sveshnikov or Classical Sicilian after 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4) 4 g3!? (4 d3 is a safer way for White to take play into a Closed Sicilian) 4...d5!? (4...g6 is again likely to reach Line A3 of Chapter Three after 5 ♗g2 ♗g7 6 d3 d6) 5 exd5 ♘d4!? is a fascinating, independent approach. Readers may enjoy analysing this possibility, but as Black rarely gets the opportunity to employ it, I'll just supply a quick overview:

6 ♗g2 (White can also try to avoid an invasion on f3, but after 6 ♘xd4!? cxd4 7 ♘b5 a6! 8 ♘xd4 e5 Black regains one of the pawns with reasonable compensation for the other: 9 ♕e2 ♗e7!? 10 ♘b3 – avoiding the rather poisoned e-pawn – 10...♕xd5 11 f3 ♗f5 gave Black sufficient development and pressure in S.Kalinitschew-V.Babula, Pardubice 2001, while 9 ♘b3 ♕xd5 10 f3 h5! 11 c4 ♕c6 12 ♕e2 h4!? 13 d4 hxg3 14 ♕xe5+ ♗e7 15 d5 g2 16 ♗xg2 ♕xc4 remained extremely messy in J.Barle-I.Jelen, Ptuj 2005) 6...♗g4 and now:

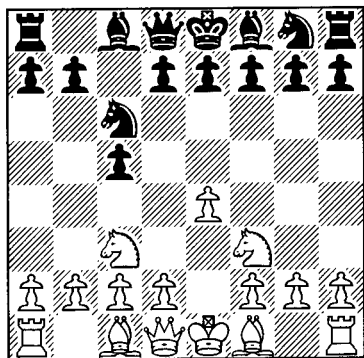
a1) 7 h3 ♗f3 8 ♗xf3 (and not 8 0-0?! ♘xe2+ 9 ♘xe2 ♗xg2 10 ♔xg2 ♕xd5+

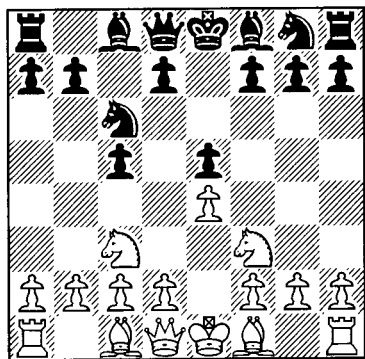
with an easy game for Black and good chances to gain the initiative, as indeed he managed with 11 ♔h2 ♖d8 12 d3 e6 13 ♘f4 ♕c6 14 ♗e3 h5! in M.Bosboom-V.Kramnik, online blitz 1999) 8...♘xf3+ 9 ♔f1 ♘d4 10 ♘xd4 (White has also tried 10 ♘f4 and after 10...h5!? 11 d3 g6 12 ♘e4 ♘xd5 13 c3 ♘c6 14 ♕e2 ♗g7 15 ♘xc5 ♘xf4 16 ♗xf4 ♕d5 17 ♘e4 0-0-0 Black had again come up with a promising pawn sacrifice in O.Nikolenko-A.Isajevsky, Sochi 2005) 10...cxd4 11 ♘b5 ♕b6!? 12 c4 a6 followed by ...d3 and/or ...0-0-0 was again extremely murky in I.Marinkovic-D.Milanovic, Ulcinj 1997.

a2) 7 0-0 ♘f3+

8 ♗xf3 (the safety-first approach, whereas 8 ♔h1 is rather risky and 8...h5 9 h3 ♕d7! 10 ♘f4 g5 11 ♗xf3 gxf4 12 h4 0-0-0 13 d3 ♗h6 14 ♖e1 ♖hg8 saw Black retain good attacking prospects in J.Bratu-M.Basto Auzmendi, Erandio 2004; as 9 h4 g5! is also quite hair-raising for him, White should perhaps prefer 9 d4!?, although 9...cxd4 10 ♕d3 dxc3 11 ♗xf3 ♗xf3+ 12 ♕xf3 ♕xd5 was hardly inspiring for him in S.Bernstein-A.Bisguier, New York 1956) 8...♗xf3 9 d4 c4 10 ♕d2 ♘xd5 11 ♘f4 e6 has received a few tests and is about even:

for example, 12 ♘cxd5 (or 12 ♘fxd5 ♗xd5 13 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 14 c3 ♗e7 15 ♖e1 ♗f6 16 ♕e2 0-0 17 ♗f4 b5! with some queenside prospects for Black, R.Berube-E.Lawson, Montreal 2004) 12...♗xd5 13 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 14 ♕g5 ♕xg5 15 ♗xg5 ♗e7 16 ♗xe7 ♔xe7 17 f4 ♔d6 and the ending should be drawn, although Black is slightly for preference with his more active king, A.Evans-P.Robertson, correspondence 1989.

b) 3...♘d4!? is a wholly independent option which some readers may wish to explore. I quite like 4 ♘xd4 cxd4 5 ♘e2 d5!? for Black, but 4 d3 is more of a problem, since 4...g6 (the move Black would like to play; probably his best is instead 4...d6 5 ♗e3 e5 when 6 ♘d5 is consistent and critical) 5 ♘xd4! cxd4 6 ♘e2 ♗g7 7 c3 dxc3 8 ♘xc3 is a little better for White (R.Ponomariov-A.Moiseenko, Kharkov 2001).

A3)

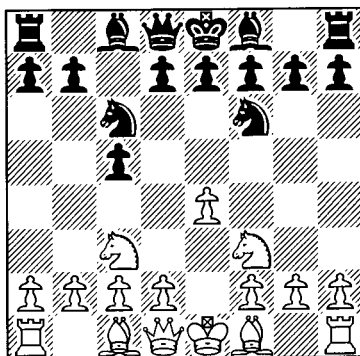
1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 ♘f3

This pretty much takes us outside our coverage since this important position is usually considered via the move order 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♘c3. I imagine that most 2...♘c6 players have given some thought to this variation, but if not please do (this anti-Sveshnikov move order is a rather fashionable one at grandmaster level). Here's a quick reminder of the various options:

a) 3...e5 is the solid, fully independent approach,

as covered by Rogozenko and more recently in John Cox's *Starting Out: The Sveshnikov.*

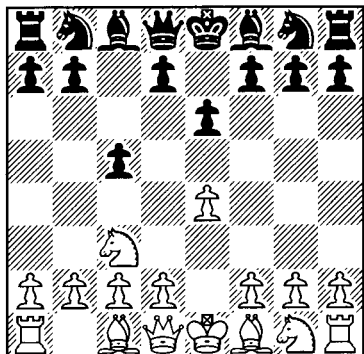
b) 3...g6 is a move order used by a number of players who don't usually employ the Accelerated Dragon. The point being that White has lost his critical Maróczy option (2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 g6 5 c4), although 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 ♗g7 6 ♗e3 ♘f6 7 ♗c4 still requires some knowledge from Black and White can also prefer a Rossolimo with 4 ♗b5.

c) 3...e6 hopes for a Taimanov or Sveshnikov (in the case of 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 ♘f6 6 ♘db5 d6 7 ♗f4 e5 8 ♗g5) and at GM-level White usually does play 4 d4. At lower levels 4 ♗b5 is quite popular, transposing after 4...♘d4 to note 'a' to White's 4th move in Line A1.

d) 3...d6 is another good way to deny White a good ♗b5 approach, but, of course, Black must be happy to play a Classical Sicilian after 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 ♘f6 or to try the unexplored 5...e5!? when White has a number of options, including 6 ♘db5 which takes play into the Kalashnikov.

e) 3...♘f6!? hopes to reach a Sveshnikov after all.

After 4 ♗b5 we've reached an ex-

tremely topical position and one which can also arise via a Rossolimo move order (2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 ♘f6!? 4 ♘c3).

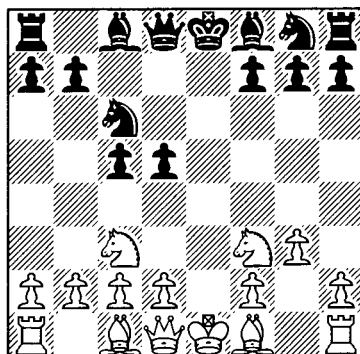
B)
1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 e6

Having previously discussed White's two most important moves, 3 g3 and 3 f4, we are left with:

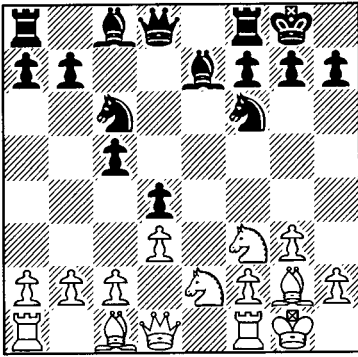
B1: 3 ♘f3
B2: 3 ♘ge2

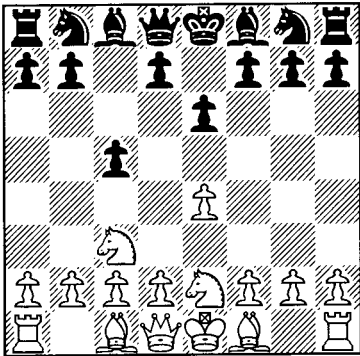
B1)
1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 e6 3 ♘f3

This reaches another position which is a little outside our scope, but still worth some brief coverage:

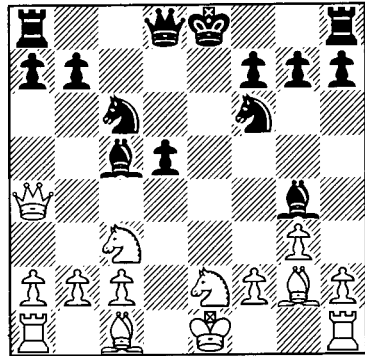
a) Kan players can opt for 3...a6 when White's only real alternative to 4 d4 is 4 g3 and after 4...b5 we've transposed to a position we considered in the notes to Black's 3rd move in Line D of Chapter Two. (A reminder that the critical line is then 5 d4!? cxd4 6 ♘xd4 ♗b7 7 ♗g2 ♘f6 when play has transposed slightly confusingly to a critical line of the fianchetto Kan and one analysed in the note to White's 6th move in Line C of Chapter Two).

b) Another important option is 3...♘c6 when 4 ♗b5 ♘d4 transposes to quite a popular hybrid system and one examined in note 'a' to White's 4th move in Line A1 of this chapter. Another approach is 4 g3 d5!? (Black can also play in Scheveningen style with 4...♘f6 5 ♗g2 d6 when any subsequent d4 will transpose to that opening) 5 exd5 exd5 which should be compared with Line B of our Closed Sicilian coverage:

b1) 6 d4 ♗g4! reveals White's knight to be a little misplaced on f3: 7 ♗e2 (and not 7 dxc5?? ♕e7+ when 8 ♗e3 d4 costs White a piece) 7...♘f6 8 ♗g5 ♗e7 9 dxc5 0-0 10 0-0 (10 ♗e3?! might appear more critical, but Black has a strong riposte in 10...♗xf3! 11 ♗xf3 d4 12 ♗xc6 dxe3 13 ♗xb7 exf2+ 14 ♔f1 ♗xc5! – Rogozenko) 10...♗xc5 11 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 12 ♕xd5 (S.Djuric-A.Vaisser, Forli 1989) 12...♗b4! (Rogozenko) sees Black regain his pawn with slightly the better position.

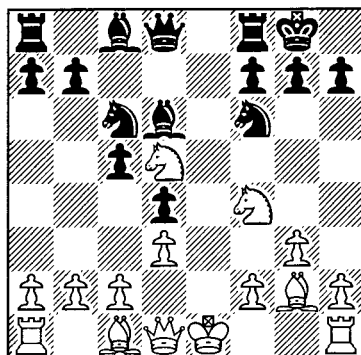
b2) 6 ♗g2 is more sensible, but after 6...d4 7 ♘e2 (best; 7 ♕e2+?! ♗e6 8 ♘e4 runs into Kholmov's 8...d3! 9 cxd3 ♘b4 and 7 ♘e4? f5 8 ♘eg5 ♕e7+ 9 ♕e2 ♕xe2+ 10 ♔xe2 h6 11 ♘h3 g5 was even worse for White in V.Vuelban-I.Miladinovic, Rome 2005) 7...♘f6 (Polugaevsky's 7...g6!? 8 0-0 ♗g7 also deserves serious consideration) 8 d3 ♗e7 9 0-0 0-0

10 ♖e1 ♖e8 11 ♘f4 ♗d6 Black enjoyed quite easy equality in W.Hug-F.Gheorghiu, Petropolis Interzonal 1973.

B2)
1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 e6 3 ♘ge2

This also gives Black options depending upon his Open Sicilian preference:

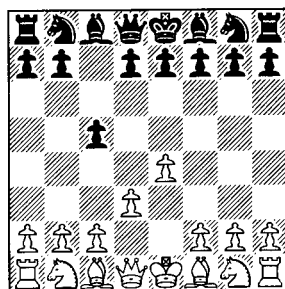
a) 3...a6 will be employed by the Kan aficionado and after 4 g3 b5 5 ♗g2 ♗b7 we're back in the notes to Black's 3rd move in Line C of Chapter Two.

b) 3...♘f6!? 4 g3 (4 e5?! ♘g4 leaves White's king's knight looking a little misplaced on e2: following 5 f4 d6 6 ♘g3 Black might even seize the opportunity to play 6...♕h4!?, and if White prefers 5 d4!? then Sveshnikov's 5...cxd4 6 ♕xd4 h5! is effective, since 7 f4 leaves White looking a little overextended and 7 ♗f4?! ♘c6 8 ♕d2 ♕b6 is even worse) 4...d5 5 exd5 exd5 often transposes to Line B of our Closed Sicilian coverage after 6 ♗g2. White can avoid a transposition with 6 d4, but after 6...♗g4 7 ♗g2 cxd4 8 ♕xd4 ♘c6 9 ♕a4, 9...♗c5!? is a reasonable pawn sacrifice, relying on Black's activity.

Emms has suggested 10 ♘xd5 (10 ♗g5 0-0 11 0-0 d4 12 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 13 ♘e4 ♕e5 14 ♘f4 ♗b6 was roughly balanced in D.Suttles-W.Hartston, Hastings 1973/74, as is 11 ♕xg4 ♘xg4 12 ♗xd8

♖axd8 13 0-0 ♖fe8) 10...♗xe2 11 ♗g5!? (trying to improve over the disastrous 11 ♘xf6+? ♕xf6 12 ♕e4+ ♔f8 13 ♕xe2 ♖e8 14 ♗e3 ♗xe3 15 fxe3 ♘d4 of V.Tseshkovsky-S.Gorelov, Aktjubinsk 1985) 11...0-0 12 ♗xf6 ♕e8 13 ♔d2; but this, while critical, is rather ambitious and after, for example, 13...♕e6 14 ♖ae1 (or 14 ♕h4 when White hopes to gain the initiative, but after 14...♖fe8 15 ♕g5 ♗f8 16 ♖ae1 h6 17 ♕e3 ♕d7! 18 ♕f4 ♘b4 it remains with Black) 14...♖fe8 15 ♕f4 gxf6 16 ♘xf6+ ♔h8 17 ♘xe8 ♖xe8 18 ♔c1 ♗b6 Black remains quite active and is most certainly not worse.

c) 3...♘c6 4 g3 d5 5 exd5 exd5 is another variation which has many similarities with our Closed Sicilian coverage. However, there is also one important difference: after 6 ♗g2 (and not 6 d4? ♗g4 with two strong threats), Black should avoid 6...♘f6 7 d4!, preferring to get in 6...d4! himself. N.De Firmian-A.Zapata, Linares 1994, continued 7 ♘d5 ♘f6 8 ♘ef4 ♗d6!? (adding a little spice to the position by maintaining the tension; somewhat more popular has been 8...♘xd5 9 ♘xd5 ♗d6 10 0-0 0-0 11 d3 ♗e6 with equality in, most famously, R.Fischer-B.Spassky, 17th matchgame, Belgrade 1992) 9 d3 (Zapata has also faced 9 ♕e2+ after which 9...♘e5 10 ♘xf6+ ♕xf6 11 ♕b5+ ♔f8! 12 0-0 g5! saw him begin a strong kingside attack in G.Franzoni-A.Zapata, Biel 1988) 9...0-0

10 0-0 ♖e8 11 ♗d2 ♘e5!? (again slightly the more ambitious choice; 11...♗d7 would have been pretty equal) 12 h3 ♗d7 13 ♘xf6+ ♕xf6 with a reasonable position for Black. Here Zapata's notes reveal that he was hoping for 14 ♗xb7?! ♖ab8 15 ♗d5 ♖xb2! 16 ♗b3?! ♗c6, forcing the rather weakening 17 f3 and revealing White's plan to trap the rook on b2 to be rather misguided.

Chapter Six

Kingside Fianchettoes: 2 d3 and 2 g3

1 e4 c5

We've already covered the king of kingside fianchetto systems, the Closed Sicilian, in Chapter Three, but White doesn't have to associate g3 with ♘c3. Indeed below we'll often see him trying to employ a Closed Sicilian formation but with a pawn instead of a knight on c3. That, the so-called clamp formation, can be quite dangerous, but not if Black responds along very similar lines to Line A1 (6 f4 ♘f6) of Chapter Three.

Our coverage now divides into:

A: 2 d3
B: 2 g3

A)

1 e4 c5 2 d3 ♘c6

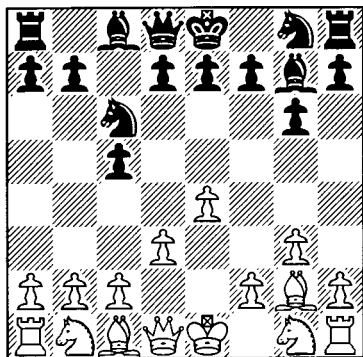
Standard, but some players may wish to also consider 2...e6 when 3 ♘f3 transposes to a King's Indian Attack (KIA) and one which usually arises via a 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d3 move order (3 ♘d2 is also likely to reach a KIA, but gives White a few extra options).

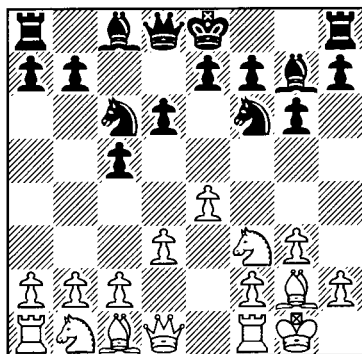
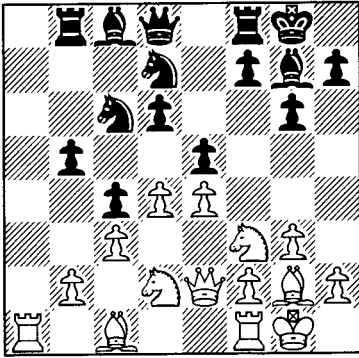
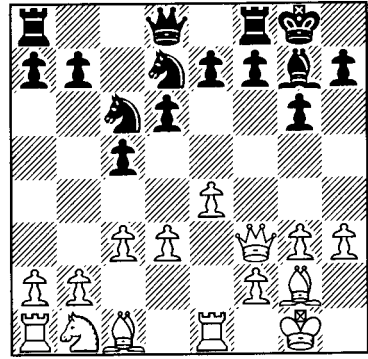
3 g3

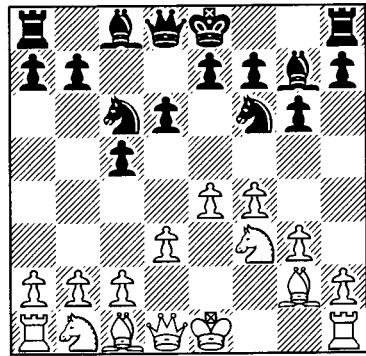
Heading for a clamp formation, but there are alternatives:

a) 3 ♘f3 intends to play a KIA formation and after 3...g6 4 g3 ♗g7 5 ♗g2 d6 we've transposed to a position that will be considered in the notes to White's 5th. Of course, this position also frequently arises via both a 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d3 and a 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d3 move order.

b) 3 f4 g6 4 ♘f3 ♗g7 often transposes to our main line after 5 g3 d6 6 ♗g2. Occasionally White tries to do without a kingside fianchetto, but such an approach is a little less testing: for example, 5 c3 d6 6 ♘a3 (or 6 ♗e2 ♘f6 7 ♘a3 0-0 8 0-0 ♖b8 9 ♕e1 b5 with direct and effective queenside counterplay in W.Arencibia-V.Akopian, Biel Interzonal 1993) 6...♘f6 7 h3 ♖b8 8 g4 (ambitious; White aims for an improved Closed Sicilian, but Black's queenside play turns out to be the more potent, partly because ...b4 will come with tempo against the slightly misplaced a3-knight) 8...b5 9 ♗g2 b4 10 cxb4 ♘xb4! 11 ♘c2 0-0 12 0-0 ♗a6 13 ♘xb4 ♖xb4 14 ♕c2 ♘d7 prepared to build up against b2 and favoured Black in M.Surtees-R.Palliser, Liverpool 2005.

3...g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7

5 f4

White doesn't have to employ a clamp formation and 5 ♘c3 would, of course, return play to Line A of Chapter Three. Somewhat less popular than our main move is 5 ♘f3, even though this reaches an important position. Following 5...d6 6 0-0 Black often adopts a Botvinnik set-up with 6...e5 and ...♘ge7 (a system which I covered recently in *Beating Unusual Chess Openings*), but another good system, and one more in keeping with our general approach against White's kingside fianchetto, is 6...♘f6 and now White has two main approaches:

a) 7 ♘bd2 0-0 8 c3 (Smyslov has preferred the immediate 8 a4 when 8...e5 9 ♘c4 h6 is a reasonable response, but Black can also aim to still push ...b5: 8...♖b8!? 9 ♘c4 a6 10 a5 ♗e6 11 ♘fd2 was J.Feagin-H.Van Kempen, correspondence 1997, and now Camper's suggestion of 11...♘g4!?, intending to further undermine a5 with ...♘ge5, looks pretty reasonable) 8...♖b8 9 a4 a6 10 ♕e2 (it's a little too early for 10 d4?!: 10...cxd4 11 cxd4 ♗g4 12 d5 ♘e5 13 ♖e1 ♘fd7! fixed White's centre and gave Black good play in T.Hauser-A.Goldin, Baden-Baden 1990) 10...♘d7 11 ♘b3 b5 12 axb5 axb5 13 d4!? c4! 14 ♘bd2 e5 (D) gave Black reasonable counterplay against White's centre in C.Yeuillaz-M.Cebalo, Saint Vincent 1998.

b) 7 c3 0-0 8 ♖e1 ♗g4 (consistent with our main line against the Clamp, but another good approach is 8...♖b8!?: the idea is to lure White forwards and 9 d4 cxd4 10 cxd4 ♗g4 supplies reasonable counterplay; instead 9 h3 ♘d7 10 d4 cxd4 11 cxd4 ♕b6! 12 d5 ♘ce5 was fine for Black in T.Casper-V.Anand, Moscow 1987) 9 h3 (standard, whereas 9 d4?! cxd4 10 cxd4 ♕b6 11 d5 ♘e5 12 ♕e2 ♖fc8 left White under some pressure in P.Schulenburg-U.Bönsch, German League 1993; White must time d4 well in this line and 9 ♘bd2!? b5 10 h3 ♗xf3 11 ♘xf3 ♘d7 12 d4 is probably a better way of doing so, after which 12...b4 13 ♗f4 ♖c8 was unbalanced but about equal in F.Sebe Vodislav-I.Kurnosov, Istanbul 2004) 9...♗xf3 10 ♕xf3 (White preferred 10 ♗xf3 in L.Ljubojevic-V.Anand, Monaco (rapid) 1994, but after 10...♘d7! – preventing White from easily advancing his d-pawn – 11 ♗g2 ♖b8 12 ♗e3 ♕c7 – and not 12...b5?! 13 e5! – 13 ♘a3 b5 14 ♘c2 b4 the current world no.1 enjoyed good play on the queenside) 10...♘d7

11 a4 a6 12 ♕e2 ♕c8 (covering c6 in preparation for ...b5) 13 ♘a3 ♖b8 14 ♗d2 b5 15 axb5 axb5 16 ♖ab1 b4 again gave Black useful queenside pressure in O.Hole-M.Sadler, Gausdal 1995.

5...d6 6 ♘f3 ♘f6

Not Black's most popular move, but a good one. Kasparov has liked to play this way as Black and it's easier to handle than both 6...e5 7 0-0, when a quick f4-f5 is on the agenda, and 6...e6 7 0-0 ♘ge7 8 c3, setting up the Clamp with good chances for the advantage.

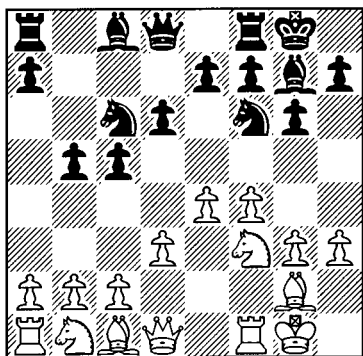
7 0-0

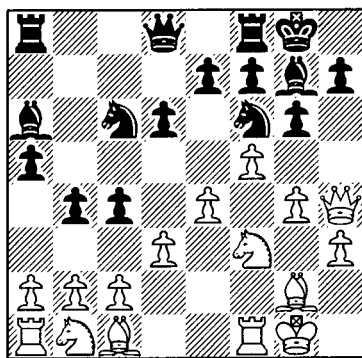
One reason that 6...♘f6 isn't more popular is because not everyone meets

the Closed Sicilian in the same way as our repertoire. Here 7 ♘c3 is, of course, not a problem since we've then transposed to Line A1 of Chapter Three. Occasionally White prefers to begin with 7 c3, but play is very likely to transpose to note 'b' to White's 8th move after 7...0-0 8 0-0.

7...0-0 8 c3

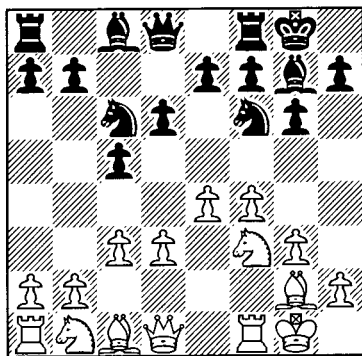
White tries to set up a clamp, but Black is much better placed to respond than he is after 6...e6. Quite possibly a transposition to the Closed Sicilian with 8 ♘c3 is objectively best and indeed leading Clamp authority, Luke McShane, has played this way.

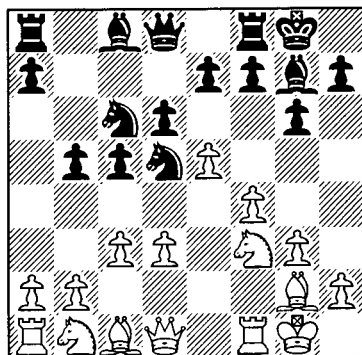
White has also tried to take control of the g4-square with 8 h3, but then 8...b5!? is a dynamic counter:

a) 9 ♘c3 is quite risky since with the 9...b4 10 ♘e2 a5 of Tu Hoang Thong-S.Zagrebelny, Bled Olympiad 2002, Black can skip ...♖b8, thereby accelerating his queenside play.

b) Black was also very fast on the queenside after 9 g4 a5 10 f5?! (White later tried to improve with 10 a4 after which Kasparov's suggestion of 10...bxa4!? – 10...b4 11 ♘bd2 ♗a6 12 ♖e1 ♖c8 13 ♖b1 d5!? 14 e5 ♘d7 15 ♘f1 e6 16 b3 f6! was another good way of gaining counterplay in Y.Visser-D.De Vreugt, Wijk aan Zee 2001 – 11 ♘c3 ♖b8 later turned out to give Black enough counterplay following 12 ♘xa4 ♗b7 13 ♗d2 ♘b4 14 ♗c3 c4! in D.Svetushkin-L.Fressinet, Dubai (rapid) 2001) 10...b4 11 ♕e1?! ♗a6 12 ♕h4 c4 in A.Fedorov-G.Kasparov, Wijk aan Zee 2001.

At first glance White might appear quite well advanced on the other wing, but his play is actually much less potent, as was shown by the 13th World Champion's 13 ♗h6? cxd3 14 cxd3 ♗xd3 15 ♖e1 ♗xh6 16 ♕xh6 (White's problem is that there's no good way to deflect the f6-knight and neither does g5 ♘h5 help him) 16...♕b6+ 17 ♔h1 ♘e5! 18 ♘bd2 ♖ac8 19 ♘g5 ♖c2 with a crushing counterattack.

c) 9 e5!? is critical, but remains untested largely, I suspect, because of Kasparov's powerful intention: 9...dxe5! 10 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 11 ♗xa8 ♗xh3 12 ♗g2 ♗xg2 13 ♔xg2 ♘c6 with a

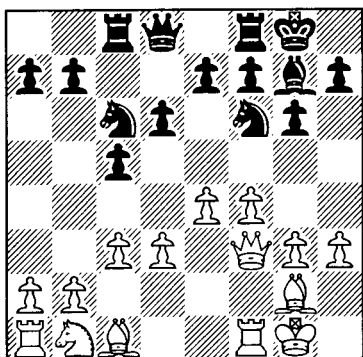
pawn, much the better pieces and by far the safer king for the exchange.

d) Since Fedorov-Kasparov, those GMs still trying to play this line have turned their attention to 9 a4!?. Now 9...bxa4 isn't ridiculous (compare with Kasparov's suggestion, above), but 9...b4 10 ♘bd2 ♗a6 11 ♕e2 ♖c8 was fine for Black in V.Malakhov-G.Baches Garcia, Benidorm (rapid) 2006. Black has been held up on the queenside for the time being, but that is by no means the end of the world: 12 ♘c4 ♘d7 (I also quite like 12...d5!? with the idea of 13 exd5 ♘xd5 14 ♘ce5 ♘d4, reminding White that c2 can become weak) 13 ♖b1 ♗xc4! 14 dxc4 ♘d4 15 ♘xd4 cxd4 16 b3 ♘c5 17 ♔h2 e6 18 ♗d2 a5 19 ♕f3 f5 and the lower-rated Spaniard was holding his own in a manoeuvring struggle.

8...♗g4

Before initiating queenside counterplay, Black decides to free his position by trading off his potentially problematic light-squared bishop, removing a useful white knight in the process. It's also possible to prepare ...b5 with 8...♖b8, but might Black even copy Kasparov with 8...b5!? ? Here the h-pawn doesn't hang so 9 e5 (otherwise Black is pretty fast on the queenside; for instance, 9 h3 a5 10 g4 ♘d7 11 ♗e3 b4 12 ♕c2 a4 13 a3 bxc3 14 bxc3 ♕a5 15 ♖c1 ♗a6 gave Black good play in Y.Hernandez-M.Sebag, Bled Olympiad 2002) must be met by 9...♘d5 which is far from clear.

The only practical example I could find continued 10 d4 (10 c4!? ♘c7! 11 ♘c3 ♖b8 12 exd6 exd6 is fine for Black) 10...♕b6! (an excellent, multipurpose location for the queen) 11 ♔h1 e6 12 dxc5 ♕xc5 13 exd6 ♖d8 and Black was slightly for preference in S.Schulz-F.Kimpinsky, German League 2005.

9 h3

White doesn't have to play this, but 9 ♗e3 gives Black a pleasant choice between 9...♖b8 and 9...d5!? 10 exd5 (critical, whereas 10 ♘bd2 d4! gave Black good play in S.Lai-K.Wolfram, Mureck 2004) 10...♕xd5 11 h3 ♗xf3 12 ♗xf3 ♕e6 13 ♗xc5 ♕xh3 14 ♗f2 e5! which isn't especially clear, although I quite like Black's activity and potential pressure against d3.

9...♗xf3 10 ♕xf3 ♖c8!?

I was a little critical of this concept (covering c6 to prepare ...b5) in the notes to Black's 7th move in Line A1 of Chapter Three, but here White is both less well developed and slower on the kingside, thereby allowing Black time to gain reasonable counterplay.

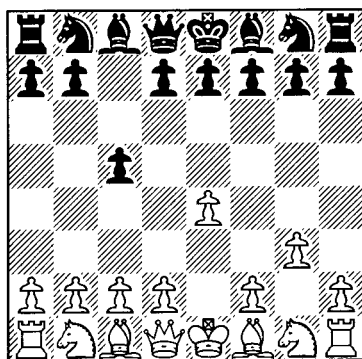
11 ♗e3

Black also gained sufficient play after 11 ♘a3 (trying to slow Black down on the queenside) 11...♘d7!? 12 ♗e3 b5! 13 ♘c2 ♘b6 14 ♔h1 ♘a4 (note this probing knight manoeuvre; had White still his king's knight, it might well have been a little slow, but here White is still to mobilize on the kingside) 15 ♖ab1 a5 in C.Braga-H.Pilaj, Calvia Olympiad 2004.

11...♘d7 12 ♘d2 b5 13 a3 a5

Black is quite fast on the queenside, although White can maintain the balance by playing to advance his d-pawn, I.Ibragimov-A.Shabalov, New York 1992.

Whether White opts for a clamp or a KIA formation, Black gains reasonable counterplay with the Closed Sicilian style ...♘f6, followed by a queenside advance.

B)
1 e4 c5 2 g3

I imagine that many readers will now be happy to play 2...♘c6 3 ♗g2 g6 with a transposition to Line A after 4 d3 or 4 f4 ♗g7 5 ♘f3 d6 6 d3. For those who prefer something different, I'll present an intriguing system which has recently begun to gain some grandmaster attention:

2...d5 3 exd5

Usual, but White's alternatives aren't so bad:

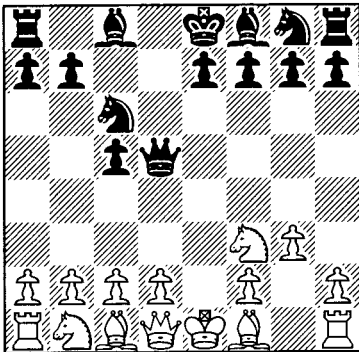
a) 3 ♗g2 dxe4 4 ♘c3!? f5!? (bravely taking up the challenge; a sensible alternative is 4...♘c6 5 ♘xe4 e5 6 d3 ♗e7, L.Drljevic-I.Chelushkina, Belgrade 2005) 5 d3 (Bogoljubow's old idea of 5 f3 might be stronger, although then Black can equalize comfortably with 5...e3!? – Raetsky) 5...exd3 6 ♗f4 ♘c6 (6...dxc2!? 7 ♕xd8+ ♔xd8 hasn't yet been tested, but might not be so bad; White is currently three pawns in arrears) 7 ♕xd3 ♕xd3 8 cxd3 ♗d7 9 ♘f3

gave White some but probably not enough compensation after 9...♘h6! 10 0-0-0 ♘g4 in S.Grishanovich-Y.Yemelin, St Petersburg 1997.

b) 3 ♘c3 can be met, according to taste, by either 3...d4 4 ♘ce2 e5 or 3...e6, transposing to the Closed Sicilian and Line B of Chapter Three.

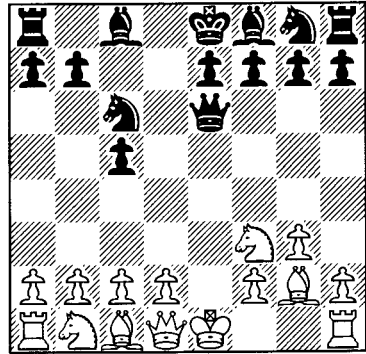
3...♛xd5 4 ♘f3

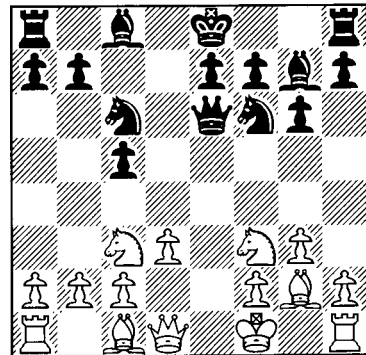
Harmless is 4 ♛f3 ♛xf3 5 ♘xf3 ♘c6 6 ♗g2 when 6...♗f5 is one good move, another being the Maróczy bind which Black set up with 6...e5 7 d3 f6 in F.Buchenau-I.Rogers, London 1988.

4...♘c6!?

Here's the slightly unusual idea which should enable Black to fight on an equal footing with a 2 g3 specialist, rather than get embroiled in the more theoretical complexities of 4...♗g4 5 ♗g2 ♛e6+ 6 ♔f1 after which his light-squared bishop can become a little pushed around on the kingside.

5 ♗g2

The logical continuation, whereas 5 ♘c3 ♛e6+ 6 ♗e2 ♘d4! threatens to remove White's bishop and is quite comfortable for Black: 7 ♘xd4 cxd4 8 ♘b5 ♛c6 9 f3 ♛d7! (an accurate follow-up, whereas 9...e5?! 10 ♗d3 a6 11 ♛e2! ♛c5 12 b4 wasn't so clear at all in V.Chernov-D.Rogozenko, Kishinev 1998) 10 ♗d3 a6 11 ♛e2 ♛d8 finally forced the pesky knight backwards and left Black slightly better after 12 ♘a3 ♘f6 13 c4 g6 14 0-0 ♗g7 in D.Batsanin-Y.Yakovich, Perm 1998.

5...♛e6+

6 ♔f1 ♘f6

Trying to provoke complications, but a good, grandmaster-endorsed alternative is 6...g6 7 ♘c3 ♗g7 8 d3 ♘f6 when Black's queenside is at least as easy to sort out as White's kingside:

for example, 9 ♗e3 b6 (the more common 9...♘d5!? has also done quite well in practice) 10 ♕d2 (10 d4?! ♘g4 11 ♗f4 backfired after 11...cxd4 12 ♘b5 ♗a6 13 a4 0-0 in O.Vodep-O.Cvitan, Oberwart 1998; there are some disadvantages to having the king on f1) 10...♗b7 11 ♗h6 0-0 12 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 13 ♖e1 ♕d7 and Black was slightly for preference in H.Reefschläger-J.Gustafsson, Dresden 2001.

7 d3

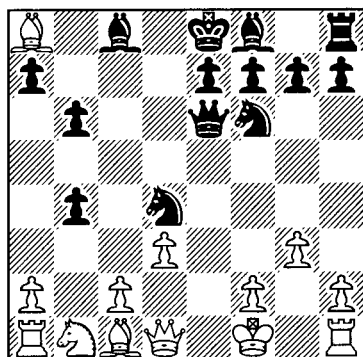
By no means essential, although 7 ♘a3 ♕d7 8 d3 e6 9 h3 ♗e7 10 ♔g1 0-0 11 ♔h2 ♘d5 12 ♖e1 b6 13 ♘c4 ♗b7 was fine for Black in E.Atalik-E.Kovalevskaya, Elista 1998. Likewise 7 ♘c3 ♕d7!? (7...g6 8 d3 ♗g7 transposes back to the notes to Black's 6th) 8 d3 e6 9 ♗f4 ♗d6 10 ♕d2 0-0 11 ♗g5 ♘d5 didn't exactly impress for White in V.Grosar-N.Sajn, Nova Gorica 1998.

7...b6!?

Again not essential (7...g6 was, for example, still a reasonable alternative), but an example of both the richness of the 2 g3 d5 variation and especially how 4...♘c6 remains rather unexplored.

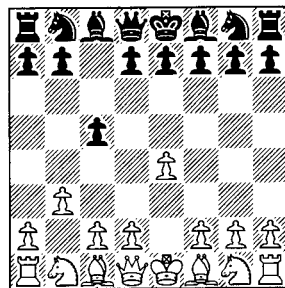
8 b4!?

White is up for the challenge and determined to prevent Black from developing smoothly.

8...cxb4! 9 ♘d4 ♘xd4 10 ♗xa8

This was an intriguing and pretty reasonable exchange sacrifice in A.Nadanian-M.Golubev, Kiev 1997. That continued 10...♕g4 11 f3 ♕h3+ 12 ♔f2 ♕f5 and remained rather unclear, but even better might be 10...♗d7!: the idea is that 11 ♗g2 is well met by 11...♗a4, while 11 h3? is too slow on account of 11...♗c6 12 ♗xc6+ ♕xc6, winning back a rook on a1 or h1. Perhaps White's best is 11 ♘d2, although after 11...♘d5!? 12 ♘e4 g6 13 ♗b2 ♗g7 Black retains good compensation, especially with White's key light-squared bishop rather offside.

It's still quite early to give a verdict on 4...♘c6, but currently this looks like a complex and fully viable option for Black.

Chapter Seven

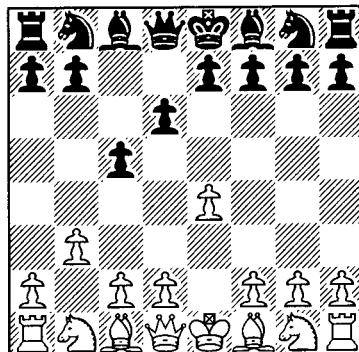
The Queenside Fianchetto: 2 b3

1 e4 c5 2 b3

This surprisingly tricky system, and one sometimes known as the Snyder variation after the American master, has become fairly popular with a growing number of grandmasters over the past five years. I suspect that they are attracted to the queenside fianchetto because it is easy to play, leads to some quite complex positions and is often not well countered in practice. Black needs to learn a reliable line against 2 b3, especially before the trickle-down effect sees it becoming popular at club level too, and we will look at:

A: 2...d6
B: 2...♘c6

A)

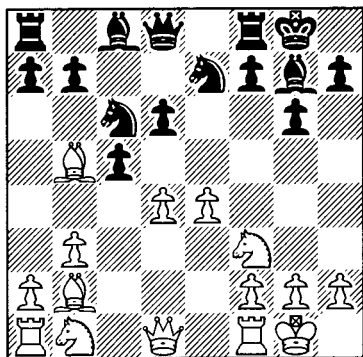
1 e4 c5 2 b3 d6

A useful and quite flexible move. Black has a number of possible follow-ups, but one reason why he is happy to commit his pawn to d6 is that 2...e6 and 3...d5 doesn't convince: White's fianchettoed bishop is well placed for the IQP position arising after an exchange on d5 and d4.

3 ♗b2

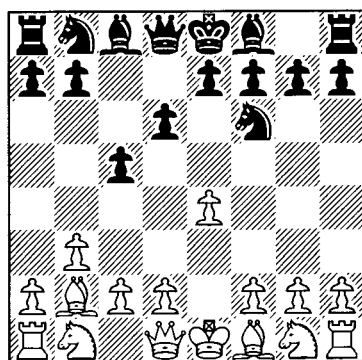
Unsurprisingly this is White's main move by far, although there are alternatives:

a) 3 ♗b5+ ♗d7 4 ♗xd7+ (4 c4!? failed to trouble Black after 4...♗xb5 5 cxb5 a6! 6 ♘c3 ♘f6 7 ♘f3 g6 8 ♗b2 axb5 9 ♘xb5 ♗g7 in A.Lein-

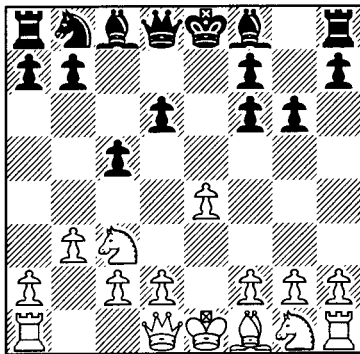
L.Polugaevsky, Buenos Aires Olympiad 1978) 4...♕xd7 5 ♗b2 ♘f6 transposes to the notes to White's 4th move in our main line.

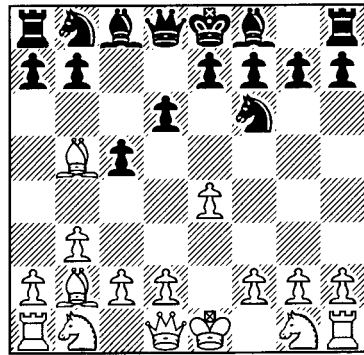
b) 3 ♘f3 ♘c6 is a position of more importance for both a 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 b3 and a 2 ♘f3 d6 3 b3 move order. With White's king's knight obstructing his f-pawn, Black gains good play by closing the long diagonal: 4 ♗b5 (or 4 ♗b2 e5 5 c3 g6 6 ♗e2 ♗g7 7 d3 ♘ge7 when ...f5 will supply good counterplay) 4...e5! 5 c3 (5 ♗b2 is likely to transpose after 5...g6 6 0-0 ♗g7 7 c3 ♘ge7 8 d4 exd4 9 cxd4 0-0; White doesn't have to play for d4, but otherwise he can easily find himself short of a plan while Black expands on the kingside: 5 ♗xc6+ bxc6 6 c4 g6 7 d3 ♗g7 8 ♗b2 ♘f6 9 ♘c3 ♘h5! was, for example, already promising for Black in H.Lwambula-P.Wells, Portsmouth 2006) 5...g6 6 0-0 ♗g7 7 d4 (this seems natural, but Black is rather well placed to cause trouble down the long diagonal) 7...exd4! 8 cxd4 ♘ge7 9 ♗b2 0-0

10 h3 (trying to prevent ...♗g4; 10 ♕d2?! ♗g4 11 dxc5 ♗xb2 12 ♕xb2 ♗xf3 13 cxd6 ♕xd6 14 ♗xc6 ♘xc6 15 gxf3 ♘d4 gave Black superb play for the pawn in A.Mordue-A.Martin, British Championship, Nottingham 1996) 10...a6 11 ♗xc6 ♘xc6 12 ♘a3 saw White trying to shore up d4 with ♘c2 in P.De la Riva Aguado-P.Cramling, Barcelona 1991, but now Gallagher's suggestion of 12...f5!? is strong: 13 exf5 (or 13 e5 cxd4 14 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 15 ♕xd4 dxe5 16 ♕c5 ♗e6! 17 ♗xe5 ♖c8 18 ♕e3 f4! and Black either picks up the exchange or the h3-pawn) 13...♗xf5 14 ♖e1 ♕f6 with strong pressure against d4 and f3.

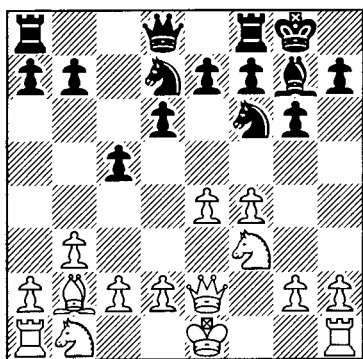
3...♘f6!?

Attacking e4 and thereby limiting White's options. Some readers might have expected 3...e5 to have been recommended, but I've never especially enjoyed playing Black after 4 ♗b5+, followed by trading the bishop if needs be, ♘e2, 0-0 and f4; White's position is at least the easier to handle here.

4 ♘c3

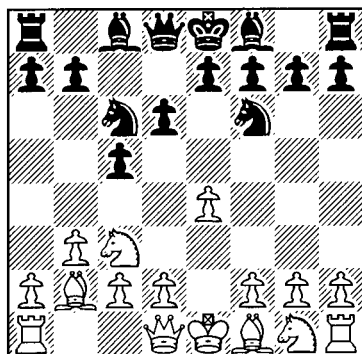
Black's last was clearly quite provocative because it gave White the option of 4 ♗xf6, but few grandmasters have been happy to make this ex-

change. White gives up the bishop-pair to damage Black's kingside, but one can also view the exchange as giving Black some useful dynamic opportunities: 4...exf6! (the safer recapture and one in keeping with our approach in the main line; creative souls may also wish to investigate 4...gxf6!? 5 ♕h5 ♗g7 6 ♘c3 ♘c6 7 ♗b5 a6 8 ♗xc6+ bxc6 9 ♘ge2 ♕d7, which has actually occurred in a few games and which leaves Black with the two bishops and some dynamic potential in return for his broken structure) 5 ♘c3 (or 5 ♗c4 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗g7 7 ♘ge2 ♘c6 8 0-0 0-0 9 f4 f5 10 exf5 ♗xf5 11 ♘g3 ♘d4 with good play for Black in M.Macko-R.Briestensky, Slovakia 2003; White really needs to try and act before Black unfurls his dark-squared bishop on the long diagonal) 5...g6

6 ♗b5+ (trying to disrupt Black; 6 ♗d3 ♗g7 7 ♘ge2 0-0 8 0-0 ♘c6 9 f4 has also been seen, but after 9...f5! 10 exf5 ♘b4 11 fxg6 fxg6 12 ♘c1 ♕h4 Black had promising activity for the pawn in U.Skorna-H.Bellmann, correspondence 2000) 6...♘c6 7 d4 (perhaps this should be prepared by 7 ♘ge2!? when 7...♗g7 8 d4 cxd4 9 ♘xd4 ♗d7 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♘de2 might be OK for White, although I still quite like Black's dynamism) 7...cxd4 8 ♕xd4 ♗g7 9 ♘ge2 (or 9 0-0-0 0-0 10 ♕xd6 ♕a5 11 ♘ge2 f5 12 ♗xc6 bxc6 13 ♕xc6 ♗e6 with good attacking chances for the two pawns) 9...0-0 10 ♕d2 f5 was promising in A.Martinenko-V.Moiseev, Kemerovo 1991; Black's activity and powerful dark-squared bishop outweigh the weakness of d6.

Another approach for White is 4 ♗b5+, although this often works better when there's a knight on c6.

Here 4...♗d7 5 ♗xd7+ ♘bxd7 (the safer recapture; 5...♕xd7!? being more provocative when 6 d3 g6 7 f4 ♗g7 8 ♘f3 0-0 9 0-0 ♘c6 10 ♕e1 ♖ac8 11 ♘bd2 ♘b4! 12 ♕c1 b5 gave Black good counterplay in L.Aronian-A.Morozevich, Monaco (blindfold) 2006, and 6 ♗xf6 gxf6 – this is one position in which 6...exf6 is less advisable; for example, 7 ♘c3 g6 8 ♘d5 ♗g7 9 ♕f3 f5 10 0-0-0! and White is better – 7 ♕h5 ♘c6 8 ♘c3 f5! 9 ♕xf5 ♕xf5 10 exf5 ♘d4 was fine

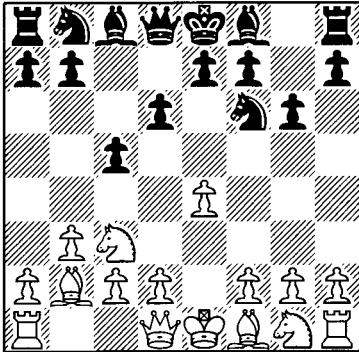
for Black in B.Spassky-R.Hübner, Buenos Aires 1978, but subsequent games revealed here 8 ♘e2 to be more testing, giving rise to a complex but probably slightly better for White position after 8...♖g8 9 0-0 ♕g4 10 ♕xg4 ♖xg4) 6 ♕e2 (or 6 d3 g6 7 f4 ♗g7 8 ♘f3 0-0 9 0-0 b5 with counterplay; note too the trick 10 ♘bd2 ♘xe4! 11 ♗xg7 ♘xd2 12 ♗xf8 ♘xf1 13 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 14 ♔xf1 ♕f6 which left Black very comfortable in K.Szczepkowska-E.Partac, Chisinau 2005) 6...g6 7 f4 (the most aggressive set-up and otherwise Black has quite easy play, as he did after 7 ♘f3 ♗g7 8 a4 0-0 9 0-0 e6 in J.Le Roux-C.Ionescu, French League 2000) 7...♗g7 8 ♘f3 0-0

9 0-0 e6! (the most flexible; Black takes any sting out of f5 and remains very solid) 10 c4 a6 11 ♘c3 ♖e8 12 d3 ♕c7 13 ♖ae1 ♖ab8 14 ♘h4 ♕d8! 15 g3 ♘h5 was fine for Black, despite White's extra space, in P.Buchnicek-J.Plachetka, Czech League 2005; it's not so easy for White to find a good plan, while Black can arrange ...b5 and/or ...f5.

4...g6

Neutralizing White's fianchettoed bishop, albeit at the cost of receiving doubled f-pawns. However, that isn't a problem for Black since he is usually able to exchange the front one with ...f5. This system currently looks like quite a good equalizer, although those who prefer not to have their pawns doubled may wish to consider the solid 4...♘c6.

Here's a quick round-up of the key ideas and variations:

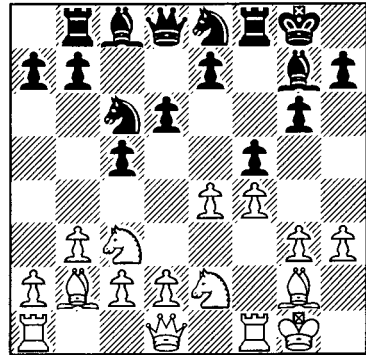
a) 5 ♗b5 ♗d7 6 f4 a6 7 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 8 ♕e2 d5! (Black often prefers 8...e6, but there is no reason not to fight for the centre, especially when 9 e5 can be met by 9...d4!) 9 exd5 ♘xd5 10 ♘h3 (10 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 11 ♘f3 ♕h5 looks fine for Black too) 10...♘xc3 11 ♗xc3 ♕d5 12 0-0 0-0-0 13 ♘g5 ♕f5 14 d3 e6 was about equal in D.Navara-Bu Xiangzhi, Turin Olympiad 2006.

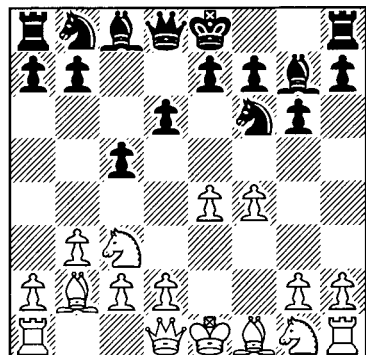
b) 5 f4 e6 6 ♘f3 ♗e7 7 ♗b5 (or 7 g3!? e5! 8 fxe5 ♘xe5 9 ♘xe5 dxe5 10 ♗b5+ ♗d7 11 ♕e2 a6 12 ♗xd7+ ♕xd7 13 a4 h5 with roughly level play in N.Short-A.Kosten, British League 2002; Black might also consider simply 8...dxe5 when his grip on d4 should compen-

sate for the slight weakness of d5) 7...♗d7 8 ♕e2 (a more accurate move order than Navara's, although Black is fairly happy to expand on the queenside as well as in the centre) 8...a6 9 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 10 d3 b5 11 a4 0-0 12 0-0 ♕b6 gave Black reasonable counterplay in M.Schulz-S.Kalinitschew, Berlin 1994.

5 ♘d5

White doesn't have to double Black's f-pawns and indeed he's tried a number of alternatives:

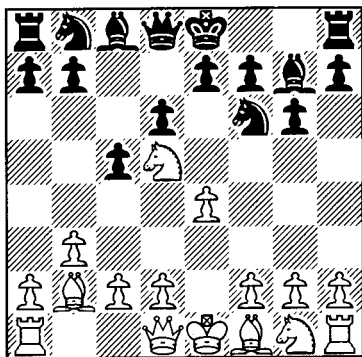
a) 5 ♗b5+ ♗d7 6 ♗xd7+ ♘bxd7 is a position which might also arise from a 4 ♗b5+ move order. After the 7 f4 ♗g7 8 ♕f3 of P.Fievet-K.Roser, Chambery 1994, there is nothing wrong with 8...0-0 9 ♘ge2 e6 followed by ...♖b8 and ...b5.

b) 5 g3 ♗g7 6 ♗g2 is a set-up with which White has scored fairly well, but against a player who some experience of our ...♘f6 systems in the Closed it shouldn't be too challenging: 6...0-0 7 ♘ge2 ♘c6 (another reasonable approach is 7...e5!? blunting White's bishops and after 8 0-0 ♘c6 9 ♔h1 ♗d7 10 d3 ♘d4 11 ♘b1!?, Black would have been fine in Kr.Georgiev-M.Gochev, Halkidiki 2007, had he continued 11...♗c6 12 c4 ♘xe2 13 ♕xe2 ♘d7) 8 0-0 ♖b8 9 f4 ♘e8! (prudent; Black both prepares ...f5 and avoids any ♘d5 ideas) 10 h3 f5

11 d3 ♘c7 12 ♖b1 e6 13 ♕d2 ♘d4 14 ♘xd4 ♗xd4+!? 15 ♔h2 b6 16 ♘d1 ♗b7 led to a balanced manoeuvring struggle in A.Kosten-M.Senff, Marseilles 2006.

c) 5 f4!? ♗g7

6 ♗b5+ (and not 6 ♘f3? ♘xe4! which saw Black net a clear pawn in A.Skripchenko-T.Kosintseva, Istanbul

2003; always watch out for tactics down the long diagonal!) 6...♗d7 7 ♗xd7+ ♕xd7 (another good approach is 7...♘bxd7 with very similar play for Black as we've already seen in other ♗b5 and f4 lines) 8 ♕f3 ♘c6 9 ♘ge2 0-0 10 0-0 ♕g4! was very comfortable for Black due to White's slight weakness on d4 in K.Shanava-P.Smirnov, Izmir 2004.

d) 5 ♘f3 ♗g7 6 ♗b5+ (or 6 ♘d5 0-0 7 ♘xf6+ exf6 8 ♗e2 ♘c6 9 0-0 ♖e8 10 d3 f5 – Ki.Georgiev – with easy play for Black) 6...♘fd7!? (avoiding the doubled pawns and preparing ...a6 and ...b5, although there's also nothing wrong with 6...♘c6 7 ♘d5 0-0) 7 0-0 a6 8 ♗xd7+ ♗xd7 9 d4 cxd4 10 ♘xd4 0-0 gave Black a reasonable version of the Dragon in Z.Zugaj-A.Wojtkiewicz, Graz 1997.

5...♗g7

6 ♘xf6+

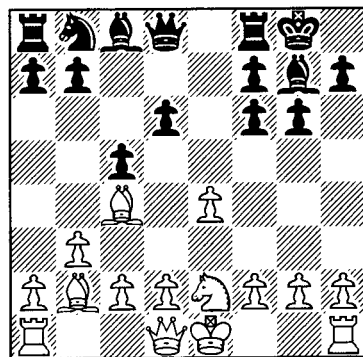
White also has 6 ♗b5+ when 6...♘c6! looks like a consistently combative approach: 7 ♘e2 0-0 8 ♘xf6+ exf6 9 0-0 ♖e8 10 ♘g3 (or 10 d3 f5 11 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 with equality) 10...h5!? 11 ♖e1 h4 12 ♘f1 h3 13 ♕f3 hxg2 14 ♘e3 ♗d7 led to a pretty complex and roughly balanced struggle in M.Mrva-B.Gelfand, Arnhem 1988.

6...exf6

Black doesn't mind an exchange of bishops in general, but there's no need to trade immediately. The text both keeps options other than ...f5 open and allows Black to recapture after any exchange on g7 with his king.

7 ♗c4

Play might transpose back to Mrva-Gelfand after 7 ♗b5+ ♘c6 8 ♘e2 0-0. White has also tried here 8 ♗xc6+ bxc6 9 ♕f3 0-0 10 ♘e2 f5 (10...♖e8!? 11 0-0 d5 is a decent alternative) 11 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 12 ♕c3+ ♕f6 which was about equal in Kr.Georgiev-N.Stavrev, Dupnica 1998.

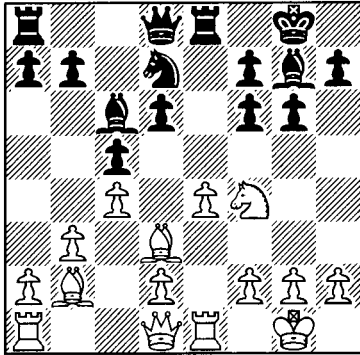
7...0-0 8 ♘e2

8...♘d7!?

Another good, and actually more common, approach is to attack e4: 8...♖e8 9 f3 (also equal is 9 d3 f5 10 ♗xg7 ♔xg7) 9...♘c6 10 0-0 ♘e5 11 ♗d5 f5 and Black had reasonable counterplay in K.Khanov-G.Rastenis, Moscow 1979.

9 0-0 ♘b6 10 ♘f4 ♗d7 11 ♗d3

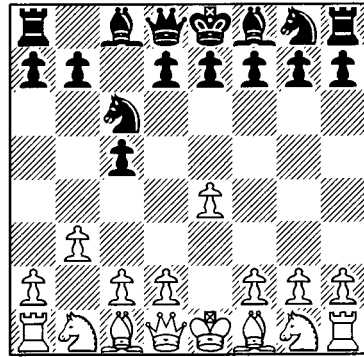
White doesn't have to keep this

bishop, but Black should be fine in any case: for example, 11 d3 ♗c6 12 ♖e1 ♘xc4 13 bxc4 ♕d7 sees Black both prepare ...f5 and arrange to exchange the white knight as soon as it lands on d5.

11...♖e8 12 c4 ♗c6 13 ♖e1 ♘d7!

Having facilitated ...♗c8-d7-c6 to cover d5, the knight heads back towards e5. Black is pretty comfortable here and after 14 ♘d5 a6 15 a4 a draw was actually agreed in Ye Jiangchuan-Xu Jun, Shenzhen 1992. Black might have continued, though, and 15...♗xd5 16 cxd5 (or 16 exd5 f5 and again I'd slightly prefer to be Black with potential good knight against bad bishop) 16...f5 17 ♗xg7 ♔xg7!? 18 exf5 ♕g5 provides good play on the dark squares for the pawn.

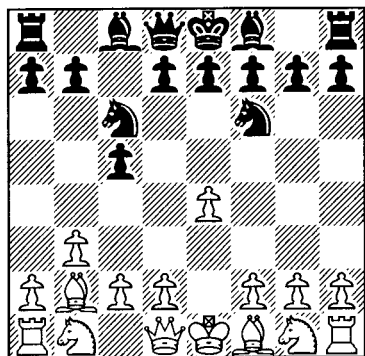
Whether or not White decides to inflict doubled f-pawns, the concept of 3...♘f6 4 ♘c3 g6 is a healthy and fairly dynamic option for Black to choose in order to counter the often tricky move 2 b3.

B)

1 e4 c5 2 b3 ♘c6

3 ♗b2

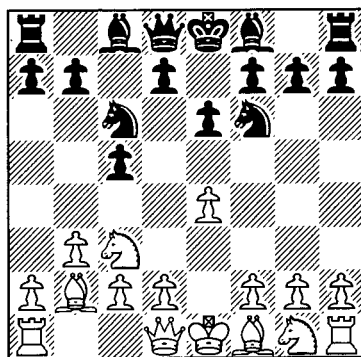
Consistent. Instead 3 ♘f3 d6 4 ♗b2 e5 5 ♗b5 was examined in note 'b' to White's 3rd move in Line A. Another rare possibility is 3 ♗b5 after which Black might just play the solid 3...d6, but I prefer 3...♘d4! 4 ♗c4 (White's usual choice, hampered as he is by the inclusion of b3; he might like to play 4 ♗d3 with the idea of c3, ♗c2 and d4, but that is fairly well met by 4...d5) 4...♘f6!? (Ehlvest's choice and a good one, although 4...e6 is also reasonable: 5 ♘e2 ♘c6 6 ♗b2 ♘f6 7 e5 ♘g4 8 f4 d5! 9 exd6 ♗xd6 gave Black good counterplay in I.Johannesson-K.Lie, Reykjavik 2002, and 5 c3 ♘c6 6 d4 d5 7 exd5 exd5 8 ♗b5 cxd4 9 ♗xc6+?! bxc6 10 ♕xd4 ♘f6 11 ♘f3 ♗a6 did likewise in M.Naigelblat-M.Lagarde, Aix les Bains 2006; note the problems caused by b3 here, especially in conjunction with making the b5-bishop unstable) 5 ♘e2?! (White is seduced by the check on f7 which is actually not so good for him, although he's curiously a little short of a good move here: 5 e5 d5! gives Black a reasonable game, such as

after 6 ♗e2 ♘d7 7 c3 ♘xe2 8 ♕xe2 g6, and 5 ♘c3 b5 6 ♘xb5 ♘xb5 7 ♗xb5 ♘xe4 can be compared with the game; Black's extra central pawn is a useful long-term asset) 5...♘xe4 6 ♘xd4 cxd4 7 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 8 ♕h5+ g6 9 ♕d5+ e6 10 ♕xe4 ♗g7 11 ♗b2 d5 12 ♕f4+ ♕f6 was promising for Black in I.Johannesson-J.Ehlvest, Reykjavik 2002. A trade of e4 for f7 is known in a number of openings, but is rarely good for White unless he maintains a lead in development in the process. Here Black has all the trumps: control of the centre, the two bishops and potential pressure against c2.

3...♘f6!?

A provocative choice, but by no means a bad one. Black lures White's e-pawn forwards, hoping to gain good Alekhine-type play with his knight on d5 and the ...d6-break.

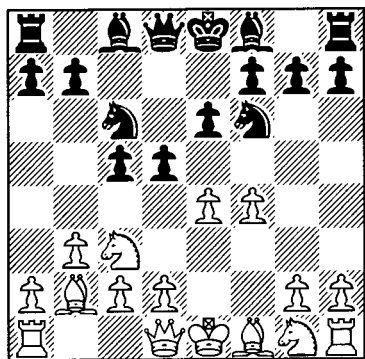
4 e5

White usually takes up the challenge thus. Just as in Line A, Black shouldn't mind seeing 4 ♗xf6 gxf6 when 5 ♕h5 has been tried in practice, but this simply gives Black a number of active approaches: 5...d5 6 exd5 ♘b4 7 ♗b5+ ♗d7 worked out fairly well in T.Effmert-M.Rehak, Bayern 2005, and I also quite like 5...♘d4!? with the idea of 6 ♕xc5?! (6 ♘a3 b6 7 c3 ♘e6 is quite original and rather unclear; the knight isn't so badly-placed at all on e6) 6...e5 7 ♕c3 d5 with some initiative.

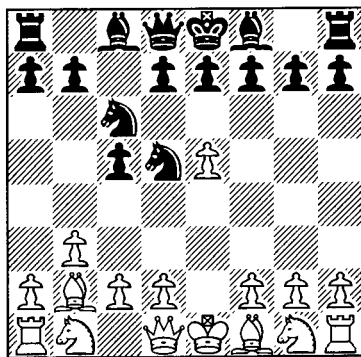
White might prefer to defend his e-pawn with 4 ♘c3, but then Black can reveal another important point behind his set-up, namely with 4...e6!, preparing to take over the centre with ...d5.

Partly due to his lack of kingside development, White seems to lack an especially good reply:

a) 5 ♗b5 ♘d4 again leaves White's pieces not ideally placed: 6 e5!? (trying to change the structure is a reasonable try; 6 ♗d3 d5 7 ♘f3 ♘xf3+ 8 ♕xf3 d4 9 ♘e2 ♗d6 is fine for Black and he might also consider simple development after 6...d6) 6...♘d5 7 ♘xd5 ♘xb5 8 ♘e3 d5!? (a little ambitious; Black might just play 8...♗e7, ...0-0 and possibly even ...b6 and ...♗b7 before touching his d-pawn) 9 exd6 ♘xd6 10 f4 f6 11 ♘f3 ♗e7 12 0-0 0-0 13 ♕e2 ♗d7 14 d4! cxd4 15

♘xd4 ♖e8 was rather unclear in S.Lohou-S.Bromberger, Bad Wiessee 1999.

b) 5 f4 d5 looks like a good version of our Grand Prix lines for Black: the fianchettoed bishop isn't really helping White at all.

After 6 e5 (not ideal, but 6 ♗b5? d4 wins the e4-pawn and 6 exd5 exd5 7 ♘f3 ♗d6 is also a little awkward for White) 6...♘g8! (refusing to obstruct the c8-bishop and also trying to bring the knight to the ideal f5-square) 7 ♘f3 ♘ge7 8 ♗b5 a6 9 ♗xc6+ ♘xc6 10 0-0 b5 11 ♘e2 ♗e7 12 ♘g3 h5! Black had a promising position in E.Quinteros-S.Baumegger, Paranana 1993.

c) 5 ♘f3 d5 (I also can't see anything wrong with 5...d6!? since 6 d4 – what else can White do as 6 ♗b5 ♗d7 isn't anything? – 6...cxd4 7 ♘xd4 ♗e7 looks like quite a reasonable version of the Open Sicilian for Black) 6 exd5 exd5 7 d4 (at least this way White gets to make some use of his fianchettoed bishop) 7...♗g4 8 dxc5 (this may appear a little misguided, but quite understandably White probably didn't like the look of 8 ♗b5 ♕e7+! 9 ♘e2 ♗xf3 10 gxf3 0-0-0) 8...♗xc5 9 ♗e2 (9 ♕e2+!? ♗e6 10 0-0-0 0-0 still gives Black plenty of activity, but might have been a better try) 9...d4 10 ♘a4 ♗b4+ was slightly better for Black in S.Horvath-P.Kiss, Zalaegerszeg 1992, since 11 c3 dxc3 12 ♗xc3 ♕a5 maintains the initiative.

4...♘d5

5 ♘f3

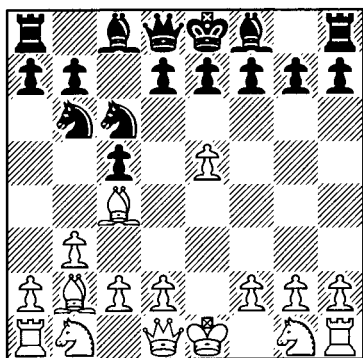
This is standard, and the alternatives aren't too impressive:

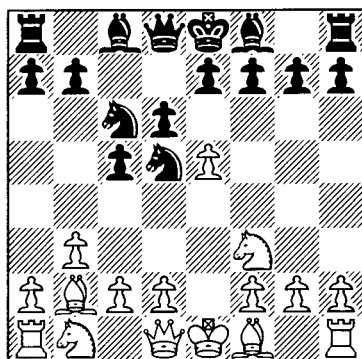
a) 5 c4 ♘f4!? 6 g3?! (probably not best, but 6 ♘f3 d6 7 g3 ♘e6 8 exd6 ♕xd6 9 ♗g2 ♘ed4 sees Black's clamp on d4 offset White's small lead in development) 6...♘e6 7 ♘f3 g6 8 ♗g2 ♗g7 9 0-0 d6 didn't give White enough for the pawn he was set to lose on e5 in R.Van Doorn-A.Van den Berg, Dutch League 1994.

b) 5 ♘c3 ♘xc3 6 ♗xc3 d5 7 exd6 ♕xd6 8 ♘f3 ♗g4 (8...e5!? 9 ♗b5 f6 is a more ambitious and also quite tempting option; observe White's lack of pawn breaks) 9 ♗e2 e6 10 0-0 ♗e7! was very comfortable for Black in P.Darini-

M.Ghorbani, Teheran 2005, and White should always be careful about drifting into such a situation: Black's clamp on d4 gives him the more active possibilities which are going.

c) 5 ♕f3 e6 (Rowson's 5...♘db4!? is also quite possible) 6 ♗c4?! (or 6 ♕g3 d6 7 ♘f3 ♘de7! – Rowson – and the knight's arrival on the kingside neutralizes White's pressure) 6...♘db4! 7 ♘a3 ♘d4 8 ♕d1 ♕g5 seizes the initiative.

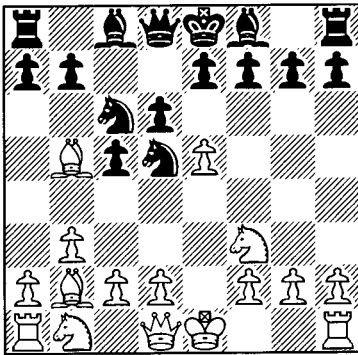
d) Rowson has also wondered whether White might try 5 ♗c4!?, although after 5...♘b6 I feel that Black will gain sufficient counterplay from this position:

for example, 6 ♗e2 d5 7 exd6 (E.Repkova-T.Henrichs, Triesen 2007) 7...e5! 8 ♘c3 (perhaps a little meek; as 8 f4 exf4 doesn't convince, White might try 8 ♘f3, but then Black has several ways to gain plenty of activity, including 8...♗xd6 9 ♗b5 e4!? 10 ♘e5 ♕g5 11 ♘xc6 ♗d7) 8...♗xd6 9 ♘f3 0-0 gives Black a potentially useful grip on the centre.

5...d6

6 ♗b5

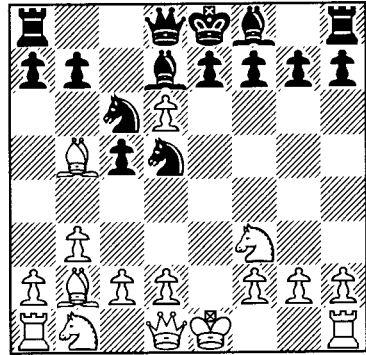
The most active deployment of the bishop and White's main choice. He has again tried a number of alternatives, but Black is generally fine against them with his central counterplay and the possibility of ...♗g4:

a) 6 ♗c4 dxe5 (another option is 6...♘f4!?, after which 7 0-0 d5 8 ♗e2 ♗f5 was fine for Black in N.Hauwert-E.Knoppert, Haarlem 1991; White might play more critically with 7 g3!?, but then 7...d5 8 ♗b5 ♘g6 leaves him loath to exchange on c6 with his kingside light squares a little tender) 7 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 8 ♗xe5 e6 9 ♘c3 was B.Spassky-G.Sosonko, Tilburg 1978, and now 9...♗d6! (Ftacnik) would have been fine for Black: 10 ♗xg7 (or 10 ♗b5+ ♔f8 11 ♗xd6+ ♕xd6 and Black's king will emerge quite happily on g7) 10...♖g8 11 ♗xd5!? (the most critical try; Black hasn't any problems after either 11 ♗h6 ♕h4! or 11 ♘xd5 exd5 12 ♗b5+ ♗d7 13 ♕e2+ ♕e7 – Rowson) 11...exd5 12 ♕e2+ ♕e7! (correctly making the pawn sacrifice permanent, rather than allow White the advantage

after 12...♗e6 13 ♗e5 ♗xe5 14 ♕xe5 ♖xg2 15 0-0-0) 13 ♗f6 ♕xe2+ 14 ♔xe2 ♗e6 15 g3 ♔d7 and Black's bishop-pair, central control and general activity supply reasonable compensation for the pawn.

b) 6 ♗e2 ♗g4 7 exd6 ♕xd6 8 h3 ♗h5 9 ♘e5 ♗xe2 (simple and quite good, although Black might also consider 9...♘f4!? 10 ♗xh5 ♘xe5 with nasty ideas of ...♘d3+ and 11 0-0 ♕d5) 10 ♕xe2 ♘xe5 11 ♗xe5 ♕c6 12 0-0 f6 13 ♗g3 0-0-0 14 ♘c3 e5 again saw Black satisfactorily construct a Maróczy Bind in E.Kahn-Bui Vinh, Budapest 2007.

6...♗d7

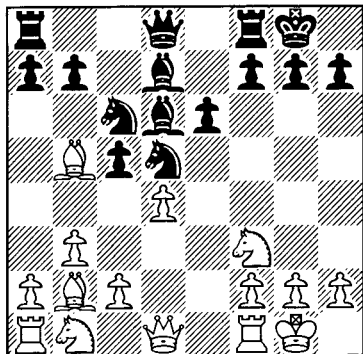
A solid and sensible choice. I'm not a fan of 6...♗g4 7 h3! ♗h5, but Black might consider 6...♕b6!?, simply trying to win the bishop-pair. This has been quite rare, but seems reasonable: 7 ♘a3 (unsurprisingly, the meek 7 ♗xc6+ ♕xc6 8 0-0 was pretty comfortable for Black after 8...♗g4 9 exd6 ♕xd6 in T.Fatianova-M.Swicarz, Wroclaw 2006, and 7 ♗c4 ♘f4 8 g3 d5 9 ♗f1 ♘g6 was also quite acceptable as e5 was a little weak in L.Steiner-A.Becker, Vienna 1931) 7...♘c7 8 ♗xc6+ (8 ♗e2!? d5 9 0-0 must be more critical, although after 9...g6 Black should have sufficient time to unravel since 10 e6?! f6 doesn't give White enough for his pawn) 8...♕xc6 9 exd6 ♕e4+! 10 ♕e2 ♕xe2+ 11 ♔xe2 exd6 12 ♖he1 f6 13 ♔f1+ ♔f7 was unclear in G.Neubert-K.Trautmann, correspondence 1982; Black is currently a little passive, but after ...d5 has good chances to activate both his bishops.

7 exd6

7...e6

Preparing to recapture with the bishop on d6, although 7...exd6!? may well not be so bad: 8 0-0 ♗e7 9 d4 (9 ♗xg7?! ♖g8 10 ♗b2 ♗h3 wins the exchange for not quite enough compensation) 9...♘c7 10 dxc5 dxc5 11 ♗d3 left both White bishops pointing at the black kingside in the game I.Rogers-P.Ostermeyer, Biel 1984, but after 11...0-0 12 ♘bd2 ♘d5 Black remained pretty solid and doesn't appear to have any problems here.

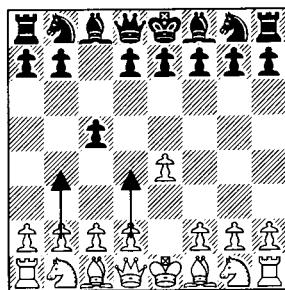
8 0-0 ♗xd6 9 d4 0-0

This position has arisen twice in practice and Black appears to be fine; his strong

d5-knight helping to offset the influence of White's fianchettoed bishop:

10 ♘bd2 ♘xd4 11 ♘xd4 cxd4 12 ♗xd7 ♕xd7 13 ♗xd4 ♖fd8 14 ♘e4 ♗f8! remained pretty level in R.Dos Santos-S.Pedersen, Matinhos 1994, and 10 dxc5 ♗xc5 11 ♘bd2 ♗e7 12 ♘e4 ♘c7 (12...f5!? 13 ♘c3 ♗f6 is another option) 13 ♗e2 f6!? 14 ♘d6 ♘e8 15 ♘xe8 ♗xe8 16 ♗c4 ♗f7 17 ♕e2 ♕c8 18 ♖fe1 e5 saw Black patiently unravel in A.Minasian-L.Aronian, Omsk 1996.

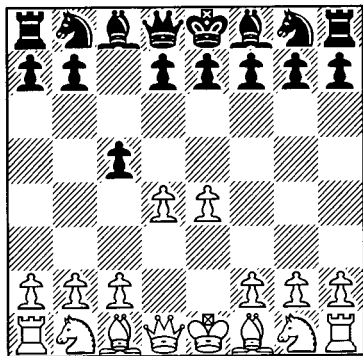
As witnessed by Black's alternatives at moves 6 and 7 in our main line, theory is still somewhat in a state of flux after 3...♘f6. What does seem to be clear, though, is that luring the white e-pawn forwards is a reasonable option, with Black currently holding his own in the resulting complex positions.

Chapter Eight

Gambits

1 e4 c5

One advantage of the Sicilian over 1...e5 is that there are fewer gambits for White. Only two are plausible, although objectively I suspect that neither suffices for equality. We will now consider:

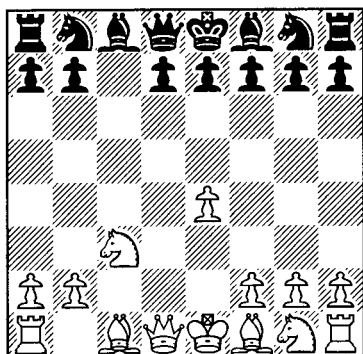
A: 2 d4
B: 2 b4

A)
1 e4 c5 2 d4

2...cxd4 3 c3

This defines the Morra Gambit (sometimes also known as the Smith-Morra Gambit), but White can also try and take play back into an Open Sicilian with 3 ♘f3. Black might be happy to oblige, but he should probably be more firm with 3...a6! when 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e5! leads to a favourable line of the O'Kelly (Black's dark-squared bishop will be developed outside the pawn chain), and 4 c3 dxc3 5 ♘xc3 takes play back into the Morra (5...♘c6 6 ♗c4 d6 is Line A1 and 5...e6 Line A2).

I must admit to being surprised as to how many strong players decline the Morra with 3...♘f6 or 3...d3. As John Watson recently wrote about accepting the gambit (in the first volume of his *Mastering the Chess Openings*), 'we have many years of experience and analysis to show that Black at the very least should have no problems equalizing and almost certainly should gain an advantage with accurate play.' Fur-

thermore, Black should relish the sharp positions which occur when White responds critically in the Morra: most Sicilian players play the opening in the first place because they are looking for complications and unclear positions. Thus I will only be advocating capturing the pawn:

3...dxc3 4 ♘xc3

We will now examine both:

A1: 4...♘c6
A2: 4...e6

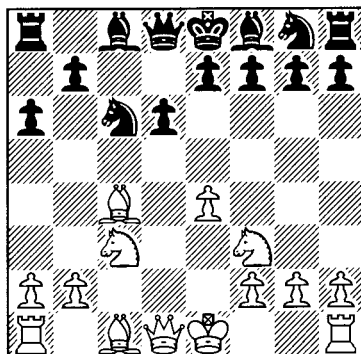
The former leads to a variation which I've always favoured and in which the onus is currently somewhat on White to demonstrate sufficient compensation, while the latter is something I've dug up for 2 ♘f3 e6 players (2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 c3!? being a possible move order) and which also looks quite promising.

A1)

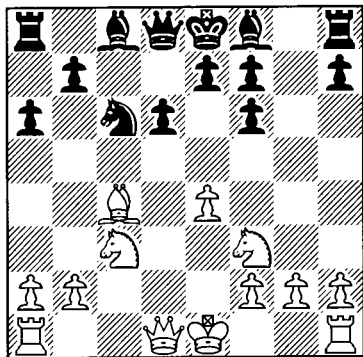
1 e4 c5 2 d4 cxd4 3 c3 dxc3 4 ♘xc3 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 d6 6 ♗c4

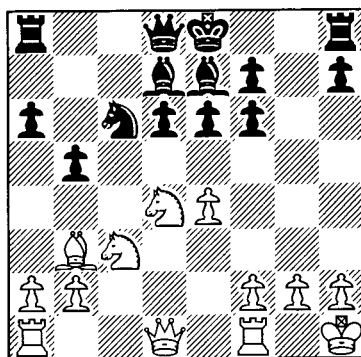
White's standard scheme of development in the Morra. Indeed he must rely on generating early piece activity to compensate for the missing pawn.

6...a6!

One of Black's best defences to the Morra, as initially demonstrated by Joe Gallagher in his classic *Beating the Anti-Sicilians*. Black's move order centres around being able to develop the light-squared bishop outside the pawn chain before playing ...e6. The text is a key link in this plan since both 6...♗g4? 7 ♗xf7+! and 6...♘f6?! 7 e5! dxe5 8 ♕xd8+ ♘xd8 9 ♘b5 are rather undesirable.

7 0-0

Very much White's most popular move in practice, but quite possibly White needs to meet Black's sophisticated move order with some sophistication of his own. As such 7 ♗g5!? was endorsed in Langrock's recent and generally quite impressive *The Modern Morra Gambit* (a work which refers to 6...a6 as 'notorious'; quite wrongly, in my view). Following 7...♘f6 8 ♗xf6 (for 8 0-0 see note 'b' to White's 8th move, below) 8...gxf6 a Rauzer-like situation

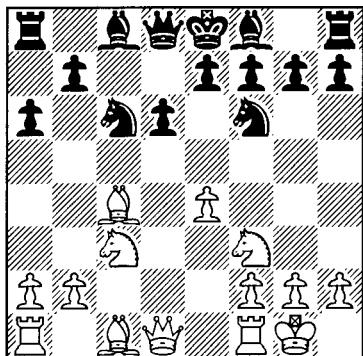
has arisen, albeit with Black, of course, having already banked an extra pawn:

9 0-0 (9 ♘h4 e6 10 ♕h5 is an even more active approach, but after 10...♕a5!? 11 ♘f5? ♘e5! 12 ♗b3 exf5 13 0-0 White's compensation for the piece was rather speculative in A.Marciniak-E.Bricard, Condom 2004, with one good option being 13...fxe4!? when both 14 ♗xf7+ ♔d8 15 ♘xe4 ♗e7 16 ♖fd1 ♗g4 and 14 ♘xe4 ♗e7 15 ♕h6 ♕d8 16 ♕g7 ♖f8 17 ♖ad1 ♗e6 see White coming up somewhat short) 9...e6 10 ♘d4 (Langrock's recommendation, freeing the f-pawn; alternatively, 10 ♕d2 ♗d7 11 ♕f4 ♘e5 12 ♗e2 h5! already saw Black putting some of his trumps to good use in I.Robertson-J.Rowson, Scottish Championship, Largs 1998, while 10 ♘h4 can be met more than satisfactorily by either 10...♗d7 11 ♕h5 ♕a5! or 10...f5!? 11 ♕h5 fxe4 12 ♘xe4 d5 13 ♘g5 ♕f6 which was already rather promising in B.Douthwaite-H.Walsh, correspondence 2002) and now Black has a reasonable choice:

a) 10...♗d7 11 ♔h1 (White has also tried the immediate 11 ♘xc6, but after 11...bxc6 12 ♕e2 ♕a5 13 ♖fd1 h5! 14 ♕f3 ♕g5 15 ♖ac1 a5 16 ♖c2 a4 17 ♖cd2 ♗e7 Black was doing quite well right across the board, especially since White's central sacrificial possibilities were under control in R.Melton-J.Edwards, correspondence 1996) 11...b5 12 ♗b3 ♗e7

13 ♖c1 (quite possibly White should prefer 13 f4!?, as Langrock himself has done in a similar position, and after 13...h5! – preventing the white queen from take up an aggressive residence on h5 – 14 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 15 f5 ♕d7 16 ♖c1 White has some pressure for the pawn; that said, Black remains quite solid in the centre and should be doing quite well after 16...♖c8 with ideas of ...h4-h3 and ...b4) 13...♕b6 14 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 15 ♕g4 ♔f8 16 ♕h4 h5 kept White at bay and saw Black slowly improving his slightly superior position in G.Johnson-G.Simms, correspondence 1998.

b) Perhaps an even better option is Donaldson's very sensible suggestion of 10...♗e7!?, intending ...0-0, ...♔h8 and ...♖g8 after which the black king

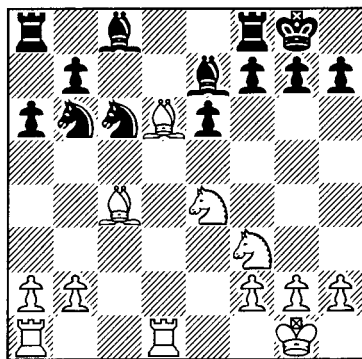
should be quite safe. This position was the source of some discussion on *www.jeremysilman.com* with Langrock countering with 11 ♘xc6 bxc6 12 ♕g4!?, but after Silman's 12...♕a5! 13 ♕g7 ♖f8 14 ♕xh7 ♕g5 15 ♖ac1 ♖g8 16 g3 ♖g6 17 h4 ♖h6 18 ♕xf7+ ♔xf7 19 hxg5 fxg5 Black's bishops and fine central control leave him with quite a pleasant advantage.

Before returning to the main line, I should just mention that the unique 7 ♗f4 ♘f6 8 ♖c1 (8 0-0 would transpose to Line A14) was seen in B.Hague-R.Palliser, Chorley 1998, when there was nothing wrong with the consistent 8...♗g4!; for example, 9 ♕b3 e6 10 ♕xb7 ♘a5 11 ♕b4 e5! 12 ♗d5 (White loses a piece after both 12 ♗g5? ♖b8 13 ♕a4+ ♗d7 14 ♗xf6 gxf6 15 ♕d1 ♘xc4 and 12 ♘d5? ♖b8 13 ♘c7+ ♕xc7 14 ♗xf7+ ♔d8 15 ♕d2 ♕b6 16 ♗e3 ♕b4) 12...♖b8 13 ♕a3 exf4 14 b4 ♘c4! 15 ♗xc4 d5 16 exd5 ♗xb4 17 ♕a4+ ♗d7 18 ♕c2 ♕e7+ 19 ♔f1 0-0 with some advantage to Black.

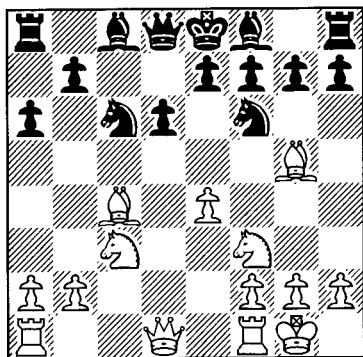
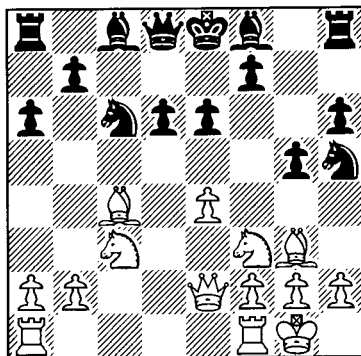
7...♘f6

We will now chiefly consider:

A11: 8 ♕e2?!
A12: 8 h3
A13: 8 b4!?
A14: 8 ♗f4

Of these options, Line A11 is how White usually develops in the Morra, but 8 ♕e2 is the exact move which Black is hoping for: 8...♗g4 is an excellent riposte as we will see. White also has a few less important options:

a) 8 e5?! is another concept which Black's move order is designed to prevent. After 8...dxe5 9 ♕xd8+ ♘xd8 10 ♘xe5 e6 (10...♗e6!? is also quite promising) 11 ♖d1 (or 11 ♗e3 ♗d6 12 ♘f3 b5 13 ♗d3 ♗b7 14 ♘d4 0-0 15 ♖fd1 ♘d5 and Black was a pawn up for very little in N.Matthews-R.Palliser, Horsforth 2001) 11...♘d7 12 ♘f3 ♗e7 13 ♗f4 0-0 14 ♘e4 ♘c6 15 ♗d6 ♘b6

16 ♗b3 ♗xd6 17 ♖xd6 ♖d8 18 ♖ad1 ♖xd6 19 ♘xd6 h6! 20 ♘e4 ♔f8 Black successfully untangled in S.Lochte-P.Wells, Berlin 1995; so long as Black is patient, White rather lacks sufficient

counterplay after the queen exchange.

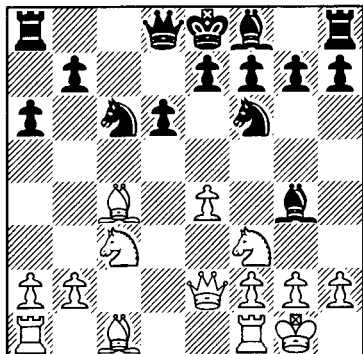
b) 8 ♗g5 isn't such a bad approach, but unlike after 7 ♗g5, Black gets to keep his structure intact:

8...e6 (Black doesn't need to know too much to employ this 6...a6 Morra antidote, but he must learn when the light-squared bishop can and cannot be deployed to g4; here 8...♗g4?! is not the right approach due to 9 ♕b3 e6 10 ♕xb7 ♘a5 11 ♕b4 ♘xc4 12 ♕xc4 ♗xf3 13 ♕c6+!) 9 ♕e2 h6!? (this dynamic and popular approach is quite effective, although there's also nothing wrong with 9...♗e7; for example, 10 ♖fd1 ♕c7 11 ♖ac1 0-0 12 a3 h6 13 ♗f4 ♕b8 14 ♗a2 ♘e5! and Black was better in J.Kolenbrander-O.Ekebjaerg, correspondence 1991; it's worth noting this ...♘e5 resource which frequently serves to stymie White's classic Morra set-up) 10 ♗h4?! (or 10 ♗e3!? ♘g4!? 11 ♗f4 ♘ge5 – 11...♕f6 might be even more accurate – 12 ♘xe5 dxe5 13 ♗e3 ♗e7 14 ♖fd1 ♕c7 15 ♖ac1 0-0 16 ♗b3 ♕a5 and Black was ready to exploit his control of d4 with ...♗c5 or ...♗f6 and ...♘d4 in K.Hayward-J.Rizzitano, Manchester (USA) 1979; thus White tried 17 ♘a4!?, but after 17...♘d4! 18 ♗xd4 exd4 19 ♖xd4 b5 Black had returned the pawn to open up his bishops with advantage) 10...g5 11 ♗g3 ♘h5

12 ♖ad1 (the more 'standard' 12 ♖fd1 achieves little here: 12...♘xg3 13 hxg3 g4 14 ♘e1 ♘e5 15 ♗b3 h5! and the Morra's possibly keenest-ever supporter was in some trouble in K.Smith-L.Evans, San Antonio 1972) 12...♘xg3 13 hxg3 ♕f6! (both emphasizing and increasing Black's dark-square control; White is already somewhat worse) 14 e5!? dxe5 15 ♘e4 ♕g7 16 ♕d2 f5! was excellent for Black in F.Costa-J.Gallagher, Lisbon 2000.

c) 8 ♗e3 can be met by either 8...♗g4!? 9 ♕b3 e6, which should be compared with Line A14, or the safe and pretty reasonable 8...e6, after which 9 ♕e2 ♗e7 10 ♖fd1 ♕c7 11 ♖ac1 0-0 12 ♗b3 ♘g4 13 ♗f4 ♘ge5 was more of the same from Black in J.Sylvan-M.Hoffmann, Biel 1994.

A11)

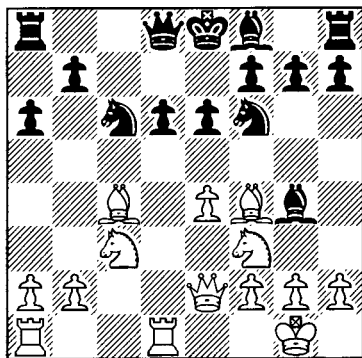
1 e4 c5 2 d4 cxd4 3 c3 dxc3 4 ♘xc3 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 d6 6 ♗c4 a6 7 0-0 ♘f6 8 ♕e2?!

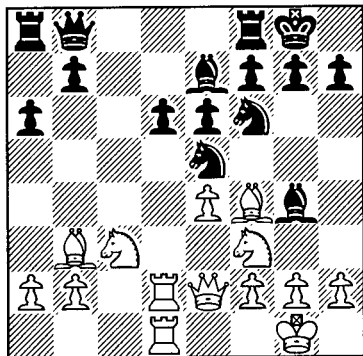
White's most popular move, but it's hard to believe that all but the most obstinate or information-phobe will continue to play for this for much longer.

8...♗g4!

9 ♖d1

A set-up White employs in many main lines of the Morra, but here it simply fails to convince. However, White has already gone wrong with neither 9 ♕d3 ♗xf3 10 ♕xf3 ♘e5 11 ♕e2 ♘xc4 12 ♕xc4 e6 13 ♕b3 ♕b8 14 ♗f4 ♗e7 15 ♖fe1 ♘d7! 16 ♖ad1 b5 (M.Zhang-M.Campbell, British League 2006) nor 9 h3 ♗xf3 10 ♕xf3 ♘e5 11 ♕e2 ♘xc4 12 ♕xc4 e6 13 ♖d1 ♖c8 14 ♕b3 ♕c7 15 ♗f4 ♗e7 16 ♖ac1 ♕b8 (Jo.Thomas-R.Britton, British Championship, Swansea 2006) being improvements. Indeed, if anything, they make matters even easier for Black who was a clear pawn up in both cases.

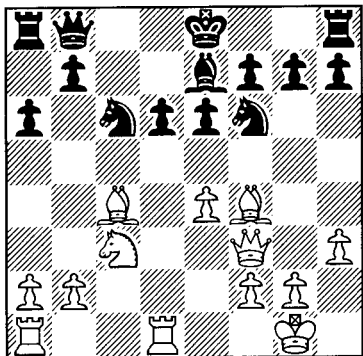
9...e6 10 h3

Forcing the pace like this is probably the best try. White more often prefers 10 ♗f4, but this simply gives Black some useful extra options:

10...♕b8 (as in our main line, this is the simplest way of dealing with the idea of e4-e5, although here 10...♘h5!? is also quite tempting: 11 ♗e3 ♕f6! emphasizes Black's control of the key central squares and after the 12 e5?! of N.Regan-Jo.Hodgson, London 1994, there is nothing wrong with 12...♘xe5 13 ♘e4 ♕f5 with a large advantage) 11 ♖d2 (trying to build up against d6; alternatively, 11 h3 ♗xf3 12 ♕xf3 ♗e7 transposes to our main line, while the more than the useful pin ensures that 11 ♘d5? fails to 11...exd5 12 exd5+ ♘e5 – Gallagher) 11...♗e7 12 ♖ad1 ♘e5! (Black really should maintain the extra pawn like this, although Gallagher's suggestion of 12...0-0!? 13 ♗xd6 ♗xd6 14 ♖xd6 ♘e5 is far from bad; after 15 ♗b3 ♕c7 16 ♕e3 ♗xf3, I.Ward-R.Palliser, Witley 1996, was agreed drawn, but Black should have played on as he'll always have at least a draw after 17 gxf3 ♖fd8 18 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 19 ♖xd8+ ♕xd8 20 f4 ♘d3! 21 ♗d5!? ♘xb2 22 ♗xb7 ♘d1 23 ♘xd1 ♕xd1+) 13 ♗b3 (13 ♗xe5 dxe5 14 h3 ♗xf3 15 ♕xf3 0-0 is simply very promising for Black; White's pieces

achieve little here and he is rather weak on the dark squares) 13...0-0

14 h3!? ♗xf3 15 gxf3 (P.Holt-R.Palliser, Guernsey 1995) 15...♘h5!? 16 ♗h2 ♗g5! 17 ♖xd6 ♘f4 18 ♗xf4 ♗xf4 (James Howell) sees Black return the pawn in order to leave White extremely weak on both the kingside and the dark squares.

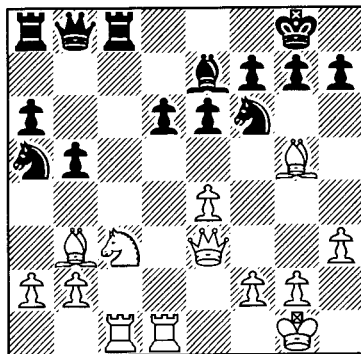
10...♗xf3 11 ♕xf3 ♗e7 12 ♗f4

White has even been so desperate as to try 12 e5, but after 12...♘xe5 13 ♕xb7 ♘xc4 14 ♕c6+ ♘d7 15 ♕xc4 0-0 16 ♗f4 d5 he had merely simplified Black's task in T.Herrstrom-B.Svensson, Swedish League 2001.

12...♕b8!

The key move. Black eliminates any notion of e5 and gives himself the useful option of ...♘e5. Furthermore, with the queen on b8 White can't really do anything down the c-file. Indeed he is probably already clearly worse with Black having excellent chances to unravel; for example:

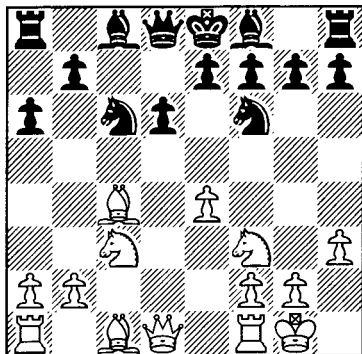
a) 13 ♖d2 0-0 14 ♖ad1 ♘e5 (yet again the key to the black position) 15 ♗xe5 dxe5 16 g4 ♕c7 17 ♗b3 ♖fd8 left Black a clear pawn ahead in J.Moreira-J.Pinheiro, Lisbon 2002.

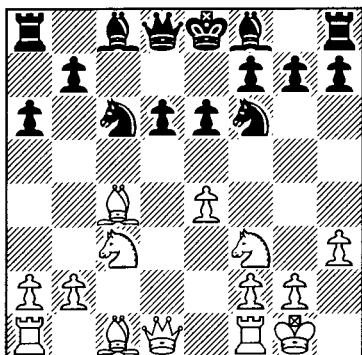
b) 13 g4 0-0 14 a4 ♖c8 15 ♖ac1 ♘d7 16 ♕g3 ♘ce5 saw White's kingside thrash not really causing any trouble at all in T.Duran-R.Forster, Plzen 1995.

c) 13 ♖ac1 0-0 14 ♗b3 ♖c8 15 ♕e3 b5 (thematically expanding on the queenside) 16 ♗g5 ♘a5

17 f4?! h6 18 ♗h4 ♘g4! 19 hxg4 ♗xh4 left Black clearly better in R.Ackermann-D.King, Bern 1992.

Black's position is rather comfortable after the common 8 ♕e2: 8...♗g4, followed by a timely ...♕b8 and ...♘e5, should promise Black some advantage.

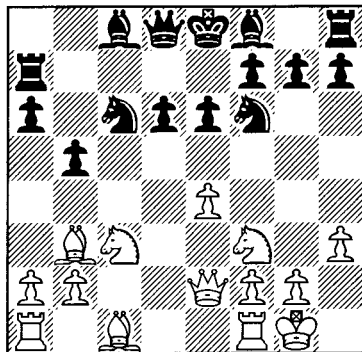
A12)

1 e4 c5 2 d4 cxd4 3 c3 dxc3 4 ♘xc3 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 d6 6 ♗c4 a6 7 0-0 ♘f6 8 h3

Clearly designed to prevent Black's main idea, but this approach is rather slow and not too challenging.

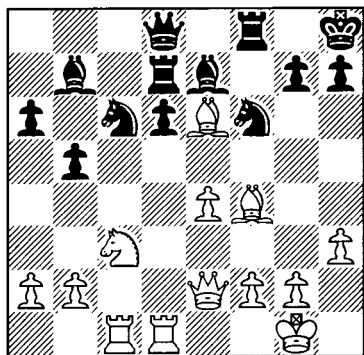
8...e6

9 ♕e2

Heading for White's standard Morra set-up. Only by bringing a rook to d1 can he hope to pose any real problems, since otherwise Black easily completes his development in peace: for example, 9 ♗e3?! ♗e7 10 a3 0-0 11 ♕c2 ♗d7 12 ♖ad1 b5 13 ♗a2?! b4 14 ♘e2 bxa3 15 bxa3 ♕a5 was excellent for Black in I.Aisu-R.Palliser, Leeds 2005; it's not just White who can hope to gain the queenside initiative.

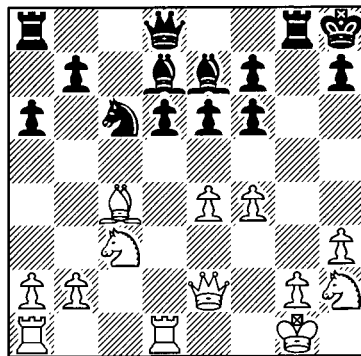
9...♗e7

As White has invested a tempo on h3, Black can choose between a few reasonable set-ups here. Another, more provocative idea which I quite like is 9...b5!? 10 ♗b3 ♖a7 and then:

a) 11 ♗e3 ♖d7 12 ♖ac1 (or 12 ♘xb5?! axb5 13 ♕xb5 ♗b7 14 e5 which was a rather speculative sacrifice in S.Vanderwaeren-O.Lemmers, Belgian League 1998; one defence is 14...♘xe5!? 15 ♘xe5 dxe5 16 ♗a4 – 16 ♖fd1 ♗d5 17 ♗g5 ♗d6 18 ♗xd5 exd5 19 ♖xd5 ♕b8 defends and wins – 16...♗d5 17 ♕a6 ♗e7 18 ♗xd7+ ♕xd7 which gives White two passers and an extra rook, but Black's minor pieces leave him for choice, especially due to the potential pressure against g2) 12...♗b7 13 ♘g5 (White needs to try and arrange some sort of sacrifice; the slow 13 ♗g5 ♗e7 14 ♖fd1 0-0 15 ♗c2 ♘e5 16 ♘d4 h6 17 ♗h4 ♘g6! 18 ♗g3 ♕a5 simply left him without anything to show for the pawn in G.Bondielli-A.Corke, Arvier 2005)

13...h6!? (13...♘a5! is a simpler approach when neither sacrifice on e6 really works) 14 ♘xe6! fxe6 15 ♗xe6 ♖e7 16 ♗f5 ♔f7 17 ♘d5 gave White some play for his piece in G.Williams-J.Anderson, correspondence 1999.

b) 11 ♖d1 ♖d7 12 ♗f4 ♗e7 13 ♖ac1 ♗b7 14 ♘g5!? (in this critical position White has also tried 14 e5?!, but after 14...dxe5 15 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 16 ♗xe5 0-0 17 ♗c2 ♖xd1+ 18 ♖xd1 ♕a8 he came up short in A.Jaumandreu Llopis-R.Schutt, correspondence 1997) 14...0-0 (14...♘a5? 15 ♗xe6! fxe6 16 ♘xe6 ♕a8 17 ♘d5 gives White a dangerous initiative for the piece) 15 ♘xe6! fxe6 16 ♗xe6+ ♔h8

17 ♗xd7 was rather unclear in F.Hedke-E.Paehtz, Senden 2001, and perhaps here Black should try 17...♘xd7!? 18 ♗xd6 ♗xd6 19 ♖xd6 ♕e7 20 ♖cd1 ♘ce5 with a rough material balance of two pieces against an active rook and two pawns.

10 ♖d1 ♗d7 11 ♗f4

White might do better with 11 ♗g5, threatening to spoil Black's structure. That said, after 11...0-0 (Gallagher's suggestion of 11...♕b8!? was tested in H.Tan-M.Burrows, Guernsey 2004: 12 a4 ♘e5 13 ♘xe5 dxe5 14 ♗xf6?! ♗xf6 15 b4 ♕c8 16 ♖ac1 0-0 17 b5 axb5 18 ♘xb5 ♗c6 and Black was somewhat better; 12 ♖d2!? might be a better try, although after 12...h6 13 ♗h4 b5 14 ♗b3 ♕b6 15 ♖ad1 ♖d8 16 ♗xf6 gxf6 17 ♘d4 h5 I'd still rather be Black in this pawn-up Rauzer scenario) 12 ♗xf6 gxf6 13 ♘h2 ♔h8 14 f4 (White would like to play 14 ♕h5, but 14...♕a5 is a useful response) 14...♖g8

15 ♔h1 ♖c8 16 ♘g4 (or 16 ♘f3 b5 17 ♗b3 ♕b6 18 ♖ac1 ♘a5 with some advantage) 16...♖g7! 17 ♗d3 ♕a5 White was rather struggling for compensation in K.Lie-N.De Firmian, Gausdal 1999. As we've already seen, ...♔h8 and ...♖g8 is a good defensive resource in many Rauzer-like positions.

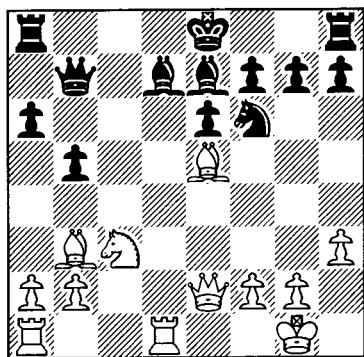
11...b5!?

Those who would prefer to prevent e4-e5 should investigate either 11...♕b8!? (our standard idea, but pretty rare here) or 11...e5 12 ♗g5 ♗e6 13 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 14 ♘d5 0-0 (V.Rozlapa-V.Belova, USSR 1967) when the position resembles the old main line of the Morra.

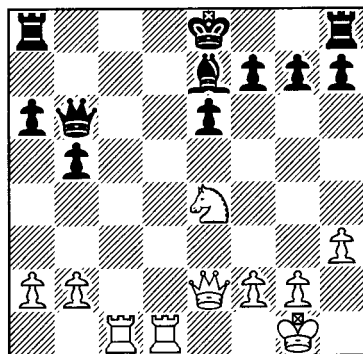
White has some positional pressure and compensation for the pawn, but some readers will no doubt be happy to try and gradually unravel as Black.

12 ♗b3 ♕b8 13 e5!

Critical. White needs to quickly open lines and 13 ♘d5? exd5 14 exd5 is rather unconvincing after Gallagher's 14...♘a5 15 ♖e1 ♘g8 when Black has good chances to unravel after ...♔f8.

13...dxe5 14 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 15 ♗xe5 ♕b7

White has managed to open some lines, but he doesn't have a killer tactic and so appears to be struggling for sufficient compensation:

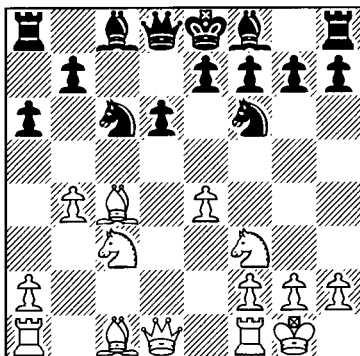
a) 16 ♖d3 0-0 17 ♖g3 gives White some pressure, but Black should be fine so long as he is careful: one defence being 17...g6 18 ♖f3 (T.Lochte-E.Stauch, Bad Wiessee 1999) 18...b4!? 19 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 20 ♖xf6 bxc3 21 bxc3 ♗c6 22 ♕g4 ♖ad8, returning the pawn in return for the superior coordination and structure; doubling on the d-file with ...♖d6 and ...♖fd8 is the plan.

b) 16 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 17 ♘e4 (Gallagher points out that 17 ♘d5 ♗d8! keeps everything covered; White should probably try 17 ♗d5!? ♗c6 18 ♗xc6+ ♕xc6 19 ♘d5, but 19...♗d8!? – 19...♗g5 20 ♕e5 0-0 21 ♕xg5 exd5 is equal – 20 ♖ac1 ♕b7 21 ♕e4 ♖b8! 22 ♕b4!? ♖c8! 23 ♖xc8 ♕xc8 24 ♕d6 f6 25 ♘b4 ♗e7 26 ♕xa6 ♕xa6 27 ♘xa6 ♔f7 after a few hairy moments leaves Black slightly better in the ending) 17...♗e7 18 ♗d5 ♗c6 (G.Montavon-J.Gallagher, Neuchatel 1994) 19 ♗xc6+ ♕xc6 20 ♖ac1 ♕b6

21 ♕f3 (Gallagher) leaves White well centralized, although after 21...0-0 22 ♖c6 (perhaps not best, but 22 ♖d7 ♖a7 23 ♖c6 ♕b8 forces White backwards) 22...♕a7 23 ♘d6 ♖ad8 his compensation is insufficient as Black will reach an ending a pawn ahead.

After 8 h3 White often regrets the tempo spent on ruling out ...♗g4. Black is probably best off with our main line – 9...b5 is also quite playable, but rather unclear – although White does retain some play for the pawn. Indeed 8 h3 is one of his better tries, albeit still quite cheery for Black.

A13)

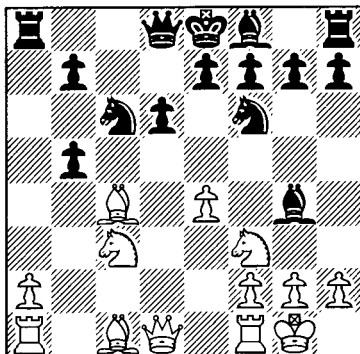
1 e4 c5 2 d4 cxd4 3 c3 dxc3 4 ♘xc3 ♘c6

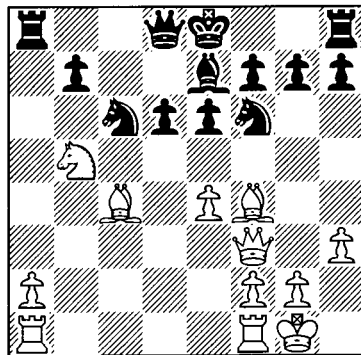
5 ♘f3 d6 6 ♗c4 a6 7 0-0 ♘f6 8 b4!?

For a while in the mid-late nineties, White was relying on this active gambit. It remains a reasonable practical try, especially because several of the key lines remain quite unexplored.

8...♗g4

And why not? The further advance of the b-pawn isn't that dangerous, whereas 8...♘xb4?! 9 e5 is.

9 b5 ♗xf3

In view of White's options on his next two turns, Black should give serious thought to preferring 9...axb5!?, as Tim Taylor has done:

a) 10 ♗xb5 g6! 11 ♗b2 (or 11 e5!? dxe5 12 ♕xd8+ ♖xd8 13 ♘xe5 ♗d7 14 ♘xd7 ♖xd7 15 ♗g5 ♘d5 and White hasn't quite enough for the pawn) 11...♗g7 12 ♘d5 0-0 13 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 14 ♗xf6 exf6 15 h3 ♗xf3 16 ♕xf3 ♘d4 was similar to our main line and rather promising for Black in F.Alozy-E.De Waard, correspondence 1998.

b) 10 ♘xb5 e6 11 ♗f4?! (11 ♕e2 ♗e7 12 ♖d1 is too slow in view of 12...0-0 13 ♗f4 d5! 14 exd5 ♘xd5 15 ♗xd5 exd5 16 ♘c7 ♖a5) 11...♗e7 12 h3 ♗xf3 13 ♕xf3

13...0-0 (13...♘e5!? must be a more critical try when 14 ♗xe5 – 14 ♕e2?! ♘xc4 15 ♕xc4 0-0 16 ♖fd1 d5 maintains the extra pawn – 14...dxe5 15 ♕g3 0-0 16 ♕xe5 ♖c8 is slightly better for Black due to his superior activity and good dark-square play) 14 ♖fd1 ♖a4 15 ♖ac1 ♕a5 16 ♘xd6 (now White is worse; he should prefer 16 ♗xd6 ♗xd6 17 ♘xd6 ♘e5 18 ♕b3 ♘xc4 19 ♖xc4 with equality) 16...♘e5 17 ♗xe5 ♕xe5 18 ♕b3? ♗xd6! 19 ♕xa4 (M.Esserman-T.Taylor, Las Vegas 2003) 19...♕h2+ 20 ♔f1 ♗f4 gives Black a powerful attack for the exchange.

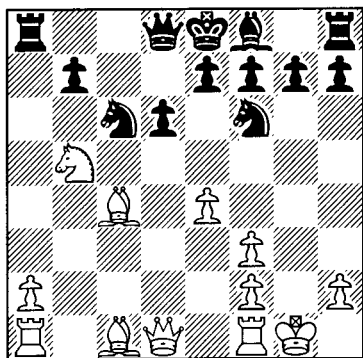
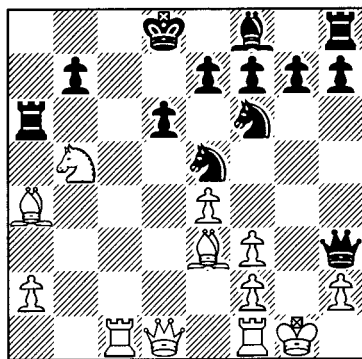
10 gxf3

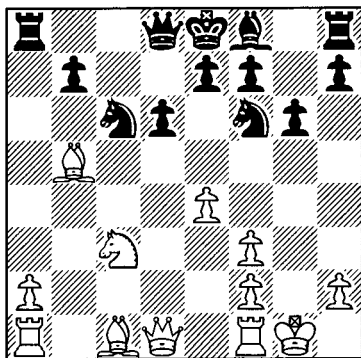
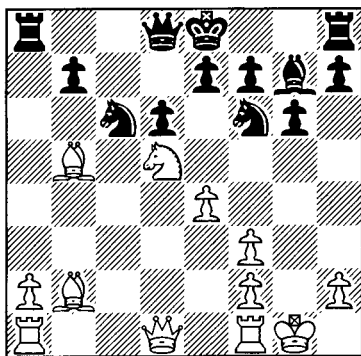
Theory has dismissed 10 ♕xf3!? ♘e5 11 ♕e2 for White on the grounds that 11...♖c8! wins a piece, but this doesn't seem at all clear to me after 12 bxa6 bxa6 13 ♗xa6 ♖xc3 14 ♗b2 ♖c5 (14...♖c7? 15 ♗xe5 dxe5 16 ♗b5+ ♘d7 17 ♖fd1 is crushing) 15 ♗d4. A much safer defence is 10...axb5 11 ♗xb5 ♘d7!? (11...g6 is also possible since 12 e5 dxe5 13 ♗g5 ♗g7 14 ♗xc6+ bxc6 15 ♕xc6+ ♔f8 should give Black time to unravel with ...h6 and ...♔g8-h7) 12 ♖d1 g6 13 ♗b2 ♗g7 with advantage; unlike in our main line, White lacks a useful ♘d5 resource.

10...axb5!

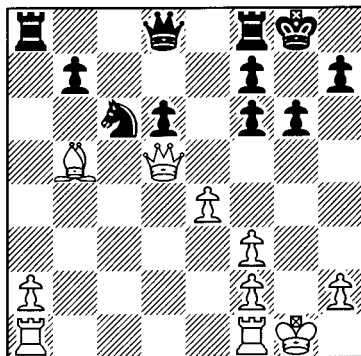
Prudent, whereas Black must avoid getting involved in 10...♘e5? 11 bxa6! ♘xc4 12 axb7! ♖a7 13 ♘b5 ♖xb7 14 ♕a4 which saw White regain her piece with advantage in N.Regan-G.Van Beek, Haarlem 1998.

11 ♗xb5

White's main move, but now Black gets to develop his kingside. Thus White should probably prefer 11 ♘xb5!?

11...♘e5! (necessary; both 11...g6?! 12 ♕b3 and 11...e6?! 12 ♗f4 ♘e5 13 ♖c1! are awkward) 12 ♗b3 (White might also consider 12 ♗e2!? e6 13 f4 when Black must again be accurate and 13...♘c6 14 ♗f3 ♗e7 – 14...d5!? 15 exd5 ♘xd5 16 ♗xd5 exd5 with the idea of 17 ♕xd5 ♕xd5 18 ♘c7+ ♔d7 19 ♘xd5 ♖a5 20 ♖d1 ♔e6 also deserves consideration – 15 ♗a3 0-0 16 ♗xd6 ♗xd6 17 ♘xd6 e5! returns the pawn, leaving Black slightly better due to his central pressure and safer king) 12...♕d7!? (a new, prophylactic idea, whereas Black has struggled in the limited practice there's been with 12...e6 13 ♗a3!? d5 14 ♗b2 when White has reasonable activity for the pawn) 13 ♗a4! (and not 13 ♘c3?? ♕h3 when Black wins, while 13 ♘d4 e6 14 ♗b2 ♗e7 15 f4 ♘c6 16 e5 dxe5 17 ♘xc6 bxc6 works out well for Black too) 13...♔d8! (brave, but Black wants to counterattack; he must avoid 13...♘xf3+ 14 ♔h1 ♕h3?? 15 ♘xd6+, but can consider 13...♘c6!? 14 ♗e3 ♖a6 – preventing White's idea of 15 ♗b6 ♖c8 16 ♘a7 – 15 ♖c1 e5 16 ♕b3 ♗e7 17 ♘a7 0-0 18 ♗b5 ♖xa7 19 ♗xa7 ♕h3 with reasonable play for the exchange) 14 ♗e3 ♖a6 15 ♖c1 ♕h3

and it's perpetual after either 16 ♘d4 ♖xa4 17 ♕xa4 ♘xf3+ 18 ♘xf3 ♕g4+ or 16 ♘a7 e6 17 ♖c8+ ♔e7 18 ♖c7+ ♔d8.

11...g6

12 ♘d5 ♗g7 13 ♗b2

13...0-0!

Allowing Black's structure to be damaged in return for forcing exchanges and the hope of later attacking with queen and knight against queen and bishop. This is quite promising, whereas 13...♘h5!? 14 ♗xg7 ♘xg7 15 ♖c1 0-0 16 ♗xc6 bxc6 17 ♖xc6 e6! (17...♖xa2? 18 ♖c8! ♕d7 19 ♖c7 ♕d8 20 ♖c8 forced a draw in R.Hardarson-N.De Firmian, Copenhagen 1999) 18 ♘e3 (18 ♘b6?! ♕g5+ 19 ♔h1 ♖xa2 20 ♖xd6 ♘h5 21 ♘d7 ♖fa8 gives Black some initiative) 18...♕g5+ 19 ♔h1 ♖xa2 20 ♕xd6 ♘h5 21 ♘g4 offers White reasonable chances to hold.

14 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 15 ♗xf6 exf6 16 ♕d5

White appears to be struggling. H.Hughes-P.Wells, Port Erin 2005, continued 16...♘e5 17 f4 ♘f3+ 18 ♔h1 (18 ♔g2!? ♖a3 19 ♗d3 ♘h4+ 20 ♔h1 is probably a better defence) 18...♕c8! 19 f5 ♕c5 20 ♗c4 ♖a5 21 ♖ac1 ♕b4 22 ♖b1? ♕d2 23 ♕d3 ♕f4 0-1, and returning the pawn with 16...f5!? might be even better: for example, 17 exf5 (or 17 ♗xc6 bxc6 18 ♕xc6 fxe4 19 fxe4 ♕g5+ 20 ♔h1 ♕f4 21 f3 ♖fc8 22 ♕b6 ♖a3 with serious pressure) 17...♕g5+ 18 ♔h1 ♘e7 19 ♕xb7 ♖ab8 20 ♕a6 ♘xf5 21 ♗c6 ♖b2 when Black's queen, knight and active rook are all poised, and 22 a4? ♘e3! 23 ♖g1 ♕f4 24 ♖g3 ♖xf2 wins.

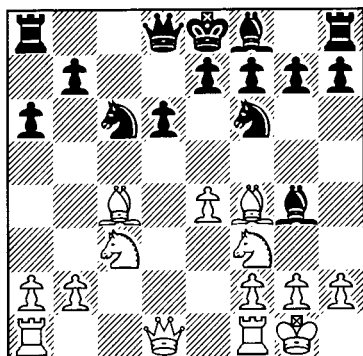
8 b4 can be quite dangerous, especially if more white players than just the few so far discover that both 10 ♕xf3!? and 11 ♘xb5!? are quite possible. The latter especially leads to quite

unclear play, unlike the main line, and so Black should consider not hurrying with the exchange on f3.

A14)

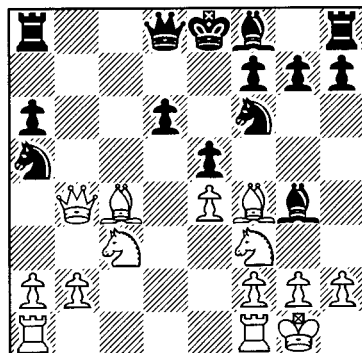
1 e4 c5 2 d4 cxd4 3 c3 dxc3 4 ♘xc3 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 d6 6 ♗c4 a6 7 0-0 ♘f6 8 ♗f4

A speciality of England's leading Morra exponent, FM Ben Hague. Play now becomes quite sharp if Black, as he should, takes up the challenge.

8...♗g4!

9 ♕b3

White can also aim for an improved version of Line A11 with 9 h3, but after 9...♗xf3 (9...♗h5!? is far from ridiculous; any double-edged g4-advance is not that scary) 10 ♕xf3 e6 11 ♖fd1 ♕b8! even the extra tempo isn't all that useful since Black is so solid; for example, 12 b4 (or 12 ♖d2 ♗e7 13 ♖ad1 ♘e5) 12...♘d7!? (not essential and 12...♘e5 13 ♗xe5 dxe5 should probably be preferred since 14 ♕g3 ♗e7! 15 ♕xg7? ♖g8 16 ♕h6 ♕c8 costs White a piece down the c-file) 13 ♖ac1 ♘ce5 14 ♕e2 ♗e7 15 ♗b3 0-0 16 ♗g3 ♖e8! 17 f4 ♘c6 18 a3 ♗f8 and White's extra space didn't give him enough for the pawn against Black's solid Scheveningen-type set-up in M.Morvay-G.Pataki, Hungarian League 2005.

9...e6 10 ♘g5

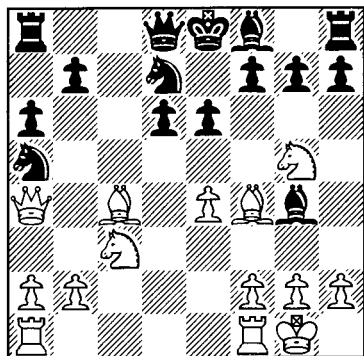
Hague's choice, avoiding the poisoned b-pawn. After 10 ♕xb7?! ♘a5 11 ♕b4 e5! White has:

a) 12 ♖ad1? ♖b8 13 ♕a4+ ♗d7 14 ♕c2 ♘xc4 15 ♗g5 ♗e7 16 b3 ♘b6 left White a clear piece in arrears in D.Mayers-R.Bates, Hastings 1995.

b) 12 ♗g5?! d5 (12...♖b8!? 13 ♕a3 d5 14 ♕a4+ ♗d7 à la Bates is also promising) 13 ♗xf6 gxf6 14 ♗b5+ axb5 15 ♕xb5+ ♗d7 16 ♕xd5 ♗c6 and again White hasn't anywhere near enough for the piece.

c) 12 ♗d5!? ♖b8 13 ♕a4+ ♗d7 14 ♕d1 exf4! (also reasonable is the simpler 14...♘xd5!? 15 ♕xd5 ♗c6 16 ♗g5 f6 17 ♕e6+ ♕e7 18 ♕xe7+ ♗xe7 19 ♗d2 f5 with an edge) 15 ♘g5 ♘xd5 16 ♕xd5 ♗e6 17 ♘xe6 fxe6 18 ♕xe6+ ♗e7 19 ♕d5 stops Black from castling and, while not sufficient, at least maintains some practical chances for the piece.

10...♘a5

Black needs to be a little careful here: 10...b5? 11 ♘xb5! ♘a5 (11...axb5 12 ♗xb5 is even worse since White will regain his piece on c6) 12 ♕a4 axb5 13 ♗xb5+ ♘d7 14 e5 d5 15 ♗d2 is rather awkward with a double-attack on g4 and a5.

11 ♕a4+ ♘d7!

12 f3!?

White is a little short of a good move here. The text is not ideal, but even worse is 12 ♗e2 ♗xe2 13 ♘xe2 ♗e7 14 ♘f3 0-0 with no real play for the pawn.

12...♘xc4

Continuing in prudent vein, whereas 12...b5? 13 ♗xb5! axb5 14 ♘xb5 ♗h5 15 ♖ac1 ♕b6+ 16 ♔h1 ♖b8 17 ♘c7+ ♔d8 18 ♖fd1 gives White good attacking chances for his piece.

13 ♕xc4

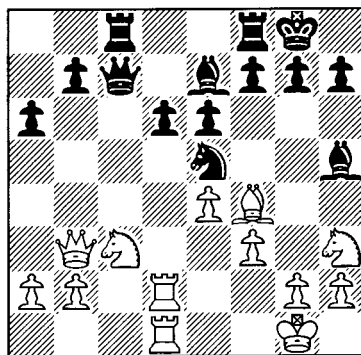
Or 13 fxg4 b5 14 ♕c2 ♘ce5 and Black covers f7, leaving him with some advantage.

13...♗h5

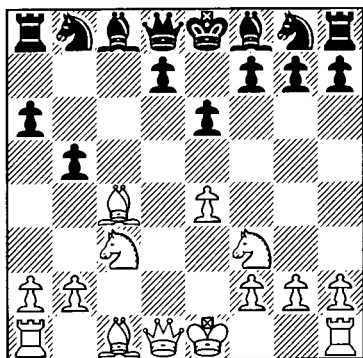
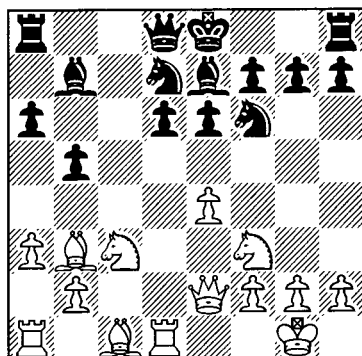
Black has good long-term chances here, not just with his extra pawn but also the bishop-pair. He must still be quite alert in the short term, but it's quite hard to fully believe in White's compensation:

a) 14 ♘xe6? fxe6 15 ♕xe6+ ♗e7 16 ♘d5 ♗f7 defends and wins.

b) 14 ♘h3 b5 15 ♕e2 ♗e7 16 ♖ad1 b4 17 ♘a4 e5! 18 ♗e3 0-0 19 b3 ♕b8 left White struggling in B.Hague-R.Palliser, Huddersfield 2004.

c) 14 ♖f2 ♗e7 (the alternative 14...b5!? is also quite reasonable, especially since 15 ♕c6 runs into 15...h6 16 ♘h3 ♕c8) 15 ♘h3 0-0 16 ♖d1 ♖c8 17 ♕b3 was B.Hague-P.Wells, British League 2007, and now the most accurate is probably 17...♕c7 18 ♖fd2 ♘e5 when White doesn't have enough for the pawn, despite the currently slightly offside h5-bishop.

8 ♗f4 ♗g4 leaves the b-pawn hanging, but capturing it is fraught with danger for White, not that the main line is that much of an improvement for him.

A2)

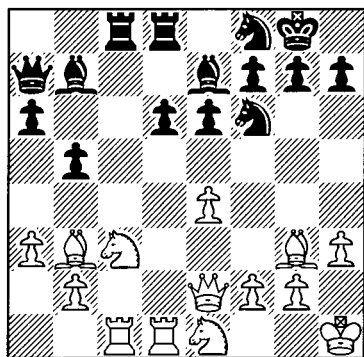
1 e4 c5 2 d4 cxd4 3 c3 dxc3 4 ♘xc3 e6 5 ♘f3 a6 6 ♗c4 b5!?

An uncompromising choice in place of the much more established 6...♘c6 7 0-0 ♘ge7 8 ♗g5 f6 9 ♗e3 b5 10 ♗b3 ♘g6. My eye was first drawn to this early ...b5 when I saw Graham Burgess, a noted Morra expert, suggesting in *NCO* that it favoured Black. Furthermore, grandmasters of the calibre of Serper and Yudasin have employed this sharp queenside advance, after which the game takes on some characteristics similar to the Sozin.

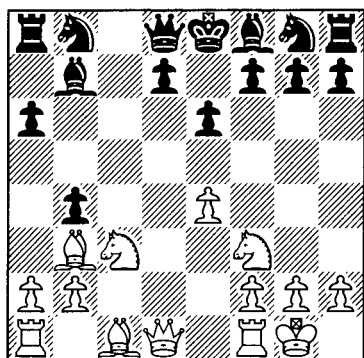
7 ♗b3 ♗b7 8 ♕e2

This has been by some margin White's most common response in practice, but he also has one less critical and one quite critical alternative:

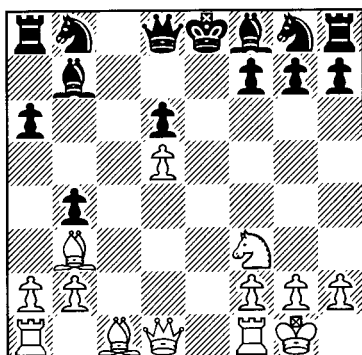
a) 8 a3?! was, slightly surprisingly, *NCO*'s main line after 7...♗b7. It is rather slow, but does enable us to see how Black should be aiming to develop his pieces: 8...d6 9 0-0 ♘d7 (designed to avoid any problems with one of White's standard Morra ploys, namely e5; here, however, Black actually often prefers 9...♘f6 since 10 e5 dxe5 11 ♕xd8+ ♔xd8 12 ♘xe5 ♔e8 is not especially scary for him) 10 ♕e2 ♘gf6 11 ♖d1 ♗e7

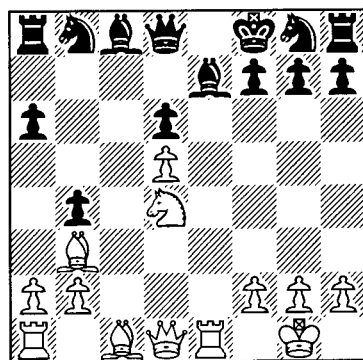
12 ♗f4 (White has to thematically build up against d6 since 12 e5? ♗xf3 13 gxf3 ♘xe5 fails to supply any compensation whatsoever, R.Gjergji-E.Rutherford, Istanbul Olympiad 2000) 12...♕b8! (not only shoring up d6, but also facilitating the important resource ...♘e5, although in keeping with our main line, Black might also consider 12...♕b6!?) 13 ♖ac1 (White has also tried to double against d6, but after 13 ♖d2 0-0 14 ♖ad1 ♘e5! exchanging on c6 would leave him planless and Black controlling all the key central squares; thus 15 ♘e1 was tried in M.Kiesekamp-A.Figura, Berlin 2006, when an immediate 15...a5!? is possible since Black is quite happy to trade b5 for e4) 13...0-0 14 h3 (or 14 ♘d4 ♘e5 15 ♗g3 ♖c8 – intending 16 f4 ♘c4 – 16 ♘xe6?! fxe6 17 ♗xe6+ ♔h8 18 ♗xc8 ♗xc8 19 ♗xe5 dxe5 20 ♘d5 ♘xd5 21 exd5 ♗d6 and Black's bishops dominated in A.Pleasants-A.Greet, British Championship, Street 2000) 14...♖d8 (14...♘e5!? is again a decent alternative) 15 ♔h1 (White is at a loss for a good plan,

partly because there isn't anything particularly good for him to do) 15...♘f8 16 ♗g3 ♕a7 17 ♘e1 ♖ac8

18 f3 ♘h5 19 ♗f2 ♕b8 20 ♕d2 ♘g6 21 ♘c2 h6 22 ♘e3 ♗g5 saw Black fully unravel and then begin to increase his advantage while White could only sit and wait in D.Scheil-A.Bangiev, correspondence 1990.

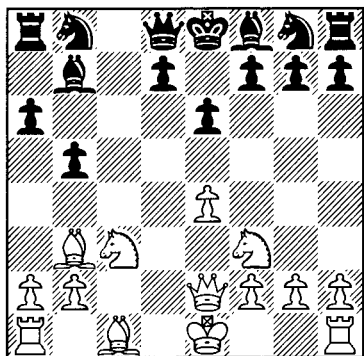
b) 8 0-0 can be simply met by 8...d6, transposing to our main line after 9 ♕e2, but a more critical continuation is 8...b4! and now:

b1) 9 ♘a4 ♗xe4 10 ♗e3 (threatening 11 ♘b6 like this is relatively the best try: 10 ♘g5?! was preferred in C.Hugot-S.Tartakower, Paris 1953, but rather than Tartakower's 10...♘f6, 10...♗g6! 11 ♕f3 ♘c6 12 ♖d1 ♘f6, as pointed out by Langrock, is simple and strong; another try is 10 ♖e1 ♘f6 11 ♘g5 when Black lost horribly after 11...♗b7?? 12 ♘xf7! in R.Probola-T.Jakubowski, Rudnik 2000, but once again 11...♗g6 is the correct and strong retreat) 10...♘c6 11 ♘c5 (one of several moves which have been tried here, but White's position is already quite unconvincing: alternatively, 11 ♘g5 ♗g6 12 f4 ♗e7 13 ♕f3 ♘f6 left White struggling in O.Van Veen-D.Stellwagen, Nijmegen 2001, and 11 ♖e1 ♘f6 12 ♘d2, should be met not by the 12...♗d5?! 13 ♘b6 ♗xb3 14 axb3 of L.Pliester-J.Van der Wiel, Ostend 1983, but rather 12...♗g6 13 ♘b6 ♖b8 14 ♘dc4 ♗e7! 15 ♗a4 0-0 16 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 17 ♕xd7 ♘xd7 18 ♗xc6 ♖fc8 with an extra pawn in the endgame) 11...♘f6 (Langrock's alternative suggestion of 11...♗xc5!? 12 ♗xc5 ♕f6 looks like it might be even better) 12 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 13 ♕c2 is analysis by Palkovi who claimed this was unclear, but, like Langrock, I find White's compensation rather unconvincing after 13...♘f6 14 ♖ac1 ♗e7 15 ♗a4 0-0!, returning one pawn to retain some advantage.

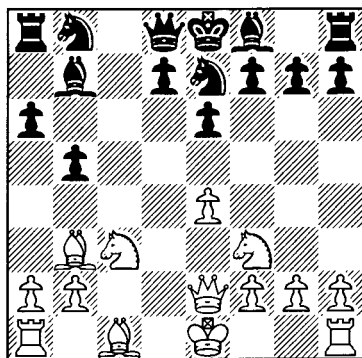
b2) 9 ♘d5!? (as 9 ♘a4 doesn't impress and the retreat to e2 achieves little, White must try this bold sacrifice if he is to justify his 8th move) 9...exd5 10 exd5 d6! (for reasons which are a little baffling to me, this has only been played twice and 10...♗d6?! on six occasions: after 11 ♖e1+ ♘e7? – 11...♔f8

must be an improvement when Roberto Alvarez analyses 12 ♕d4 ♕f6!? 13 ♕e4 ♕e7! 14 ♕d3 ♕f6 15 ♕e4 with a draw – 12 ♘g5! 0-0 13 ♕h5 h6 14 ♘e4 ♕c7 15 ♗xh6! White was somewhat better in M.Zelic-D.Sermek, Makarska 1995) and now:

b21) Alvarez's suggestion of 11 ♕e1+!? ♗e7 12 ♕xb4 ♕c7 13 ♖e1 deserves serious attention and at least this way White picks up a pawn while retaining some initiative, although I'd still take Black after 13...♘d7 (13...♘f6? 14 ♗h6!! is an impressive and awkward resource) 14 ♘d4 ♘c5; for example, 15 ♘f5 (or 15 ♗f4 ♘d3 16 ♘b5 axb5! 17 ♕xb5+ ♕d7 18 ♕xd3 ♘f6 when White is struggling, as 19 ♕e3 ♗xd5 20 ♗xd5 ♘xd5 21 ♕f3 ♘c7 sees his compensation running out) 15...0-0-0! 16 ♗e3 g6! 17 ♘xe7+!? (17 ♗d4 gxf5 18 ♗xh8 ♘f6 19 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 is good for Black) 17...♘xe7 18 ♖ac1 ♔b8 19 ♗f4 ♔a8 20 ♖xc5 ♕xc5 21 ♕xc5 dxc5 22 ♖xe7 ♗xd5 with an extra exchange in the ending.

b22) 11 ♖e1+ ♗e7 12 ♘d4 ♔f8 (just as in certain lines of the 6 ♗g5 Najdorf, Black is well advised to evacuate his king from the e-file: he does have a few coordination difficulties and c6 is a little weak, but surely White doesn't have enough for a whole piece here?) 13 ♘f5 (after other tries Black should consider returning a pawn or even two to free his position: for example, 13 ♗f4 ♘d7 14 ♘f5 ♘e5! 15 ♕d4 a5 16 ♘xe7 ♘xe7 17 ♗xe5 dxe5 18 ♖xe5 ♘g6 19 ♖e3 ♕d6 20 ♖ae1 ♖d8 21 ♗a4 ♔g8 22 ♖e8+ ♖xe8 23 ♖xe8+ ♘f8 24 ♕e4 h5 25 ♗b3 ♖h6 and, despite all his heroics, White comes up short; or 13 ♗d2!? ♗f6 14 ♗xb4 ♘e7 15 ♖e6 ♘c8 16 ♗a4 ♘d7 and White lacks a good follow-up, with 17 ♖e3 ♗xd5! 18 ♘c6 ♗xc6 19 ♗xc6 ♖a7 20 ♗xd6+ ♘xd6 21 ♕xd6+ ♗e7 defending and winning) 13...♗c8 14 ♘d4 (exchanges generally favour Black and 14 ♘xe7 ♘xe7 15 ♕d4 ♘d7 16 ♕xb4 ♘c5 17 ♗f4 ♗f5 certainly leaves White struggling)

14...♗f6! (the materialistic 14...♘f6 15 ♗d2 a5!? also deserves attention, but it is very important that Black remains vigilant in such positions; S.Moncher-R.Negro, Mogliano Veneto 1994, dem-

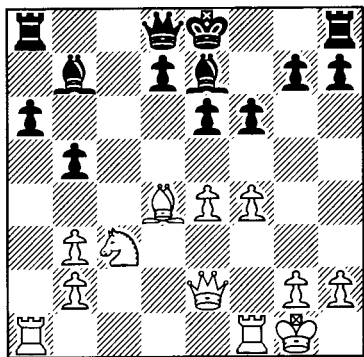
onstrated that bringing the king to g7 does not always solve all Black's problems: 14...h5!? 15 ♗f4 ♗g5 16 ♕d2 ♗xf4 17 ♕xf4 ♕f6?! 18 ♕e3 ♗d7 19 ♖ac1 g6?! 20 ♖c7 ♘h6 21 ♘e6+! and Black came under huge pressure) 15 ♘c6!? (the only really active try and at least this way White gets a useful passed pawn and some pressure on d6; he might first prefer 15 ♗f4, but then Black can even consider 15...g5! 16 ♗e3 ♔g7 when the gash in his kingside does not really compensate for the piece) 15...♕c7!? (denting White's hopes, whereas 15...♘xc6 16 dxc6 ♘e7 17 ♗f4 ♘f5 18 g4!? gives him some play, albeit quite possibly not enough) 16 ♕e2 g6 17 ♗f4 ♔g7 18 ♖ac1 ♘xc6 (not essential, but the simplest) 19 dxc6 (or 19 ♖xc6!? ♕a7 20 ♗xd6 ♕d4 with some advantage as Black is very close to completing his development with ...♘h6 and ...♗b7) 19...♘e7 20 ♕d2 ♖d8 and, despite the passed c6-pawn, Black is a piece up for not very much at all.

Returning to 8 ♕e2:

8...d6

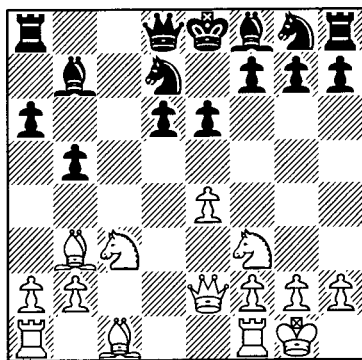
Heading for a typical Sicilian development, but with this exact move order, Langrock draws attention to 8...♘e7!?. This does indeed look both quite promising and like an improved version of the 6...♘c6 7 0-0 ♘g6 system as ♕e2 is not a move White would there like to play so early:

a) 9 0-0 ♘g6 10 ♗e3 (or 10 a3 ♗e7 11 ♗e3 ♘c6 12 ♖fd1 0-0 13 ♖d2 d6 14 ♖ad1 ♕c7 and Black was a pawn up for not too much in O.Ravazzoli-M.Quinteros, Villa Ballester 1994) 10...♗d6!? (the more conventional 10...♗e7 11 ♖fd1 0-0 12 ♖ac1 ♘c6 is also fine) 11 ♖fd1 ♗f4 12 ♗c5?! (12 ♗xf4!? ♘xf4 13 ♕e3 ♘g6 14 ♖d6 0-0 15 ♖ad1 must be a more critical test) 12...♕c7 13 ♗d4 0-0 14 g3 ♗h6 was fairly promising for Black in J.Sylvan-A.Bykhovsky, Copenhagen 1992.

b) 9 ♗f4 ♘g6 10 ♗g3 ♘c6 11 h4 d6 12 ♖d1 was H.Langrock-G.Schebler, Goch 2003, when Langrock recommends 12...♕f6!? 13 0-0 (13 ♗xd6? ♗xd6 14 ♖xd6 ♘f4 15 ♕f1 ♘e5 is a graphic illustration of how important control of the central dark squares often is in the Morra) 13...♗e7 14 ♗xd6

♗xd6 15 ♖xd6 ♘xh4 16 ♘xh4 ♕xh4 17 ♖fd1 0-0 with advantage to Black, but White shouldn't be any more than a little worse after 17 ♘xb5!? 0-0 (17...axb5 18 ♕xb5 ♖a7 19 ♖xc6 regains the piece) 18 ♘c3 ♘e5.

c) 9 ♗g5 (White's standard bishop development in the 6...♘c6 variation and one which provokes a small weakness) 9...f6 (9...h6 10 ♗e3 ♘g6 11 0-0 ♗e7 is another promising option) 10 ♗e3 ♘bc6 11 0-0 ♘a5! 12 ♘d4 ♘ec6 (now we see why Black delayed ...♘g6: exchanges are imminent and White is struggling) 13 f4! ♘xd4 14 ♗xd4 ♘xb3 15 axb3 ♗e7

16 ♕h5+ g6 17 ♕h6 ♗f8 18 ♕h3 ♗g7 19 ♗c5 ♔f7 20 f5 gave White some pressure, but not enough for the pawn in J.Garcia Ramos-D.Barria, Valencia 2003.

9 0-0 ♘d7!

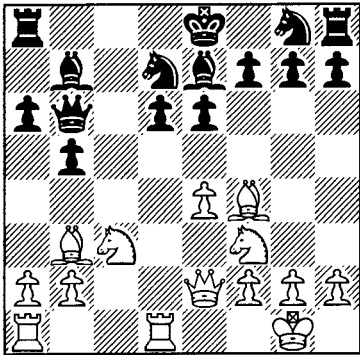
Black's motto in this variation should be develop the queenside before the kingside. Here it's important to avoid the inferior 9...♘f6?! 10 e5! dxe5 11 ♘xe5 with the powerful threat of 12 ♘xf7.

10 ♖d1

Building up against d6 in thematic Morra style. White has also tried 10 ♘d4 hoping for the Sozin-like 10...♗e7? 11 ♗xe6!, but after 10...b4!? (10...♘gf6 is a calm and sensible alternative) 11 ♘d5? (White has to try 11 ♘a4 ♘gf6 12 f3 ♗e7 – 12...♕a5!? 13 ♗d2 ♘c5 is a forcing and possibly superior option – 13 ♗d2 still with some play for the pawn, such as after 13...a5 14 ♖ac1 ♘e5 15 ♕b5+ ♕d7 16 ♖fd1) 11...exd5 12 exd5+ ♗e7 13 ♘f5 ♔f8 14 ♗f4 he surely didn't have enough for the piece in G.Spain-M.Sims, Wanganui 2005; for example, 14...♘c5!? (probably even more precise than the game's also promising 14...♘e5) 15 ♖ad1 ♕d7 16 ♗c2 g6 17 ♘xe7 ♘xe7 18 ♗h6+ ♔g8 19 ♕f3 f5 20 ♖fe1 ♔f7 and Black wins.

10...♗e7!?

A more popular option is 10...b4 11 ♘a4 (11 ♘d5? exd5 12 exd5+ ♗e7 is rather unconvincing; White wants his rook on e1 not d1 to try and make any such sacrifice work) 11...♘gf6 12 ♖d4 when White has some play for the pawn. This also seems quite playable

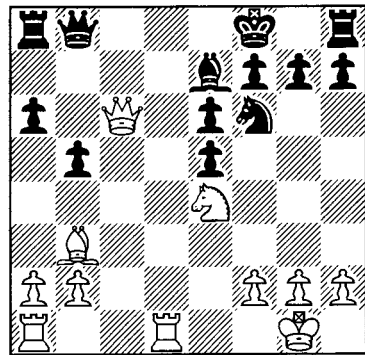
for Black, but I prefer the text which poses White different problems.

11 ♗f4 ♕b6!?

I quite like this move; a novelty when writing the first draft of this book, but since then it's received an outing. A more popular and also fairly reasonable option is 11...♕b8 and then:

a) 12 ♘g5!? (R.Runonen-E.Van de Wynkele, Estonia 2004) 12...♘gf6! (rightly not fearing White's sacrifices) 13 ♘xe6!? (as Martin points out, 13 ♗xe6? fxe6 14 ♘xe6 ♔f7 15 ♘g5+ ♔g8 is clearly insufficient) 13...fxe6 14 ♗xe6 ♘c5 15 e5 ♘xe6! (15...dxe5? 16 ♗xe5 ♕a7 17 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 18 ♘d5 is somewhat less clear) 16 exf6 ♔f7 (calm play from Black, but it appears to work) 17 ♖e1!? (or 17 fxe7 ♘xf4 18 ♕g4 ♘g6 19 ♕f5+ ♔e8 with ideas of ...♖a7 and even ...♗xg2) 17...♕c8 18 fxg7 ♖e8 19 g8♕+ ♖xg8 20 ♕h5+ ♖g6 21 ♕xh7+ ♖g7 22 ♕f5+ ♗f6 defends, leaving Black much better.

b) 12 ♕d2?! ♘gf6! 13 ♗xd6 ♗xd6 14 ♕xd6 ♕xd6 15 ♖xd6 b4 regains the pawn with some advantage, K.Nikhelesh-B.Vioreanu, Goa 2002.

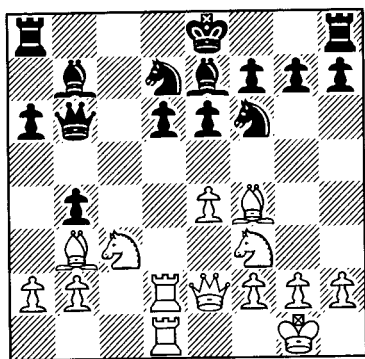
c) 12 ♖ac1?! ♘gf6 13 ♘d5!? (not great, but also not a bad practical try as White wants to avoid 13 a3 with a transposition to note 'a' to his 8th move) 13...exd5 14 exd5 ♘f8 with the idea of ...♘g6 called this version of the ♘d5-sacrifice into question in P.Lize-S.Richter, correspondence 1998.

d) 12 e5! (White must force the pace) 12...♗xf3! 13 ♕xf3 ♘xe5 14 ♗xe5 dxe5 15 ♕c6+ ♔f8 16 ♘e4 undoubtedly gives White some play for his pawn due to his activity on the open files and Black's misplaced king. However, after 16...♘f6 it is not so easy to dent the black position.

Here Langrock appears to be correct when he indicates that best play is 17 ♘d6 ♗xd6 18 ♖xd6 (H.Langrock-G.Bouroutzakis, Kiel 2000) 18...♔e7! 19 ♖xe6+! (19 ♖ad1? ♖c8 20 ♖xe6+ ♔f8 defends) 19...fxe6 20 ♕xe6+ ♔d8 21 ♖d1+ ♔c7 22 ♖c1+ with perpetual.

12 e5!?

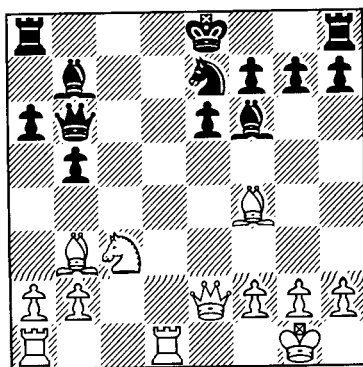
Thematically trying to open the position for his more active pieces, just as White does after 11...♕b8. Alternatively:

a) 12 ♗e3?! ♕a5 leaves White rather short of a good move, while Black intends 13...♘gf6 and 14...0-0. Perhaps he might try 13 a3 ♘gf6 14 ♗d2, but then Black has at least 14...♕d8 15 ♗f4 ♕b8 with a much improved version of 11...♕b8.

b) 12 ♖d2 ♘gf6 13 ♖ad1 was seen in E.David-H.Borchgrevink, Norwegian Team Championship 2007, when 13...b4! is promising, as Martin indicated on ChessPublishing:

14 e5 (Martin's 14 ♘a4 ♕b5! sees White coming up short, as does 14 ♗xd6 bxc3 15 bxc3 ♗xd6 16 ♖xd6 ♕c7 17 ♗a4 0-0-0) 14...bxc3!? 15 exf6 cxd2 16 fxe7 doesn't appear to give White enough for the exchange after 16...♕b4!: for example, 17 ♗xd2 ♕g4 or 17 ♕e3 e5 18 ♗g3 ♔xe7 19 ♕g5+ ♔f8.

12...dxe5 13 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 14 ♕xe5 ♗f6!?

At first it looks like 14...♘f6 15 ♗e3 ♕c6 is just very good for Black. Quite possibly it is after 16 f3 0-0 17 ♖ac1 ♕e8!, but not the flashy 17...♘g4?! due to 18 ♘d5! ♕xd5 19 ♗xd5 ♘xe5 20 ♗xb7 and White regains the pawn.

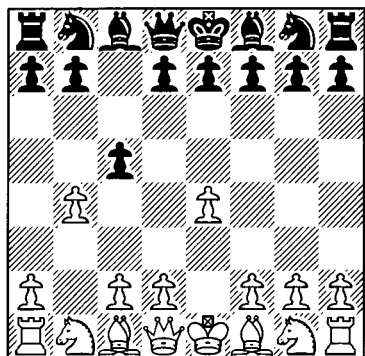
15 ♕e2 ♘e7

This position could do with a test or two, but I believe that White's compensation is insufficient after the likes of 16 ♘e4 ♗xe4 17 ♕xe4 0-0 18 ♖d6 ♕a5 or 16 ♖d6!? ♕c5 (16...♕a5 17 ♖ad1 0-0 18 ♖d7 is not so clear with ♗c7 a possibility) 17 ♖ad1 0-0 18 ♖d7 ♘g6.

Matters remain quite unexplored in our main line and Black must be careful, but if he is, he has a good chance of emerging from a complex late opening/early middlegame with the advantage. However, our main line might not even be best play: meeting 8 0-0 with 8...b4 and 8 ♕e2 with 8...♘e7 appears to be even better on the current evidence.

B)

1 e4 c5 2 b4

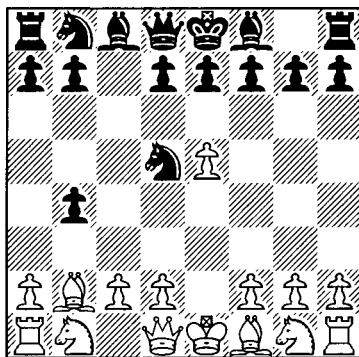
The Wing Gambit. Compared with the Morra, White gets a central majority instead of a lead in development for his pawn. Just as there patience is the key to Black's play, although he will frequently find White provoking interesting complications which can be accepted; returning the extra pawn at a

key moment, as well as its very presence, has helped Black to win many a game against 2 b4.

2...cxb4

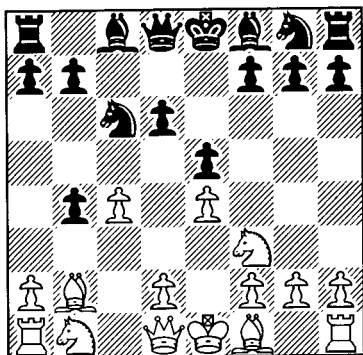
Acceptance must be critical and we will now chiefly focus on:

B1: 3 a3
B2: 3 d4
B3: 3 ♘f3

Lesser options include:

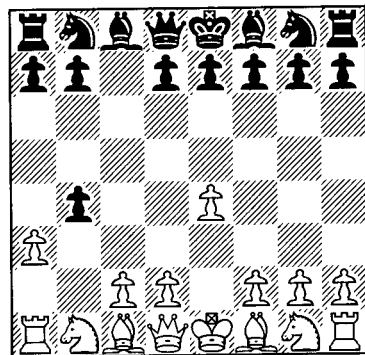
a) 3 ♗b2 ♘f6!? (sensibly luring White's centre forwards in a bid to later undermine it, while also blunting the b2-bishop, and this c3-Sicilian-like plan is probably best; Black has also tried 3...d5 4 exd5 ♕xd5 when 5 a3 transposes to Line B1, but 5 ♘f3 followed by 6 c4 may give White something for his pawn) 4 e5 (instead with 4 ♗c4 White hopes to dissuade Black from capturing on e4 with a little tactic, but Black should not be dissuaded: 4...♘xe4! 5 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 6 ♕h5+ ♔g8 7 ♕d5+ e6 8 ♕xe4 ♘c6 9 ♘f3 d5 and not only was Black a pawn up, but he also had a strong centre and the bishop-pair; far more than enough for his slightly tangled kingside in I.Rogers-E.Hoeksema, Groningen 1991) 4...♘d5

5 c4!? (exchanging knights is a reasonable try, whereas the alternatives aren't too impressive: 5 ♘f3 e6 6 d4 b6 7 a3 ♗b7 8 axb4 ♗xb4+ 9 c3 ♗e7 10 c4 ♘b4 11 ♘c3 0-0 12 ♗e2 a6 was K.Pedersen-M.Taimanov, Kapfenberg 1970, when Black was ready to strike back with his d-pawn and even 13 d5!? d6 would have left him better; 5 ♗c4 ♘b6 6 ♗b3 ♘c6 7 d4 d5 8 exd6 ♕xd6 9 ♕f3 ♗e6! left White struggling due to his vulnerable pawn-down queenside in J.Houtman-I.Rogers, Groningen 1991; and 5 a3 is probably best to avoid such problems, although I prefer Black after 5...e6 6 axb4 ♗xb4 7 c4 ♘e7, H.Schulz-C.Michna, Norderstedt 2005) 5...bxc3 6 ♘xc3 (and not 6 dxc3?! e6 7 c4 ♕a5+! 8 ♘d2 ♘c3 9 ♕c2 ♘a4 with a large advantage for Black, H.Schulz-E.Gullaksen, Hamburg 2002) 6...♘xc3 7 ♗xc3 d5 (perhaps Black should prefer 7...e6!? 8 ♘f3 b6 when White's compensation isn't so obvious; his only really

aggressive idea is to put his queen on g4, but 9 ♕a4 ♗b7 10 ♕g4 ♘a6! 11 ♗e2 ♘c5 12 0-0 h5 13 ♕f4 ♗e7 isn't too troubling for Black) 8 exd6 ♕xd6 9 ♘f3 ♘c6 10 ♗c4 ♗e6 was H.Schulz-L.Ftacnik, Hamburg 2004, and now 11 ♕b3 ♗xc4 12 ♕xc4 would have retained some play for the pawn, such as after 12...e6 13 ♖b1 0-0-0 14 0-0 ♕d5 15 ♕a4.

b) 3 c4?! hopes to build a broad pawn centre, but Black can and should stop such a plan in its tracks: 3...e5 4 ♗b2 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 d6

6 d4 (desperately trying to open lines; something slower like 6 a3 ♘f6 7 d3 bxa3 8 ♘xa3 ♗e7 doesn't really leave White with anything for the pawn) 6...exd4! 7 ♘xd4 ♘f6 8 ♘d2 ♗e7! 9 ♕a4?! (snatching back the material like this is just what Black is hoping for, although even the superior 9 ♗d3 0-0 10 0-0 ♘xd4 11 ♗xd4 ♘d7! 12 ♕b1 ♘c5 13 ♗c2 ♘e6 left White worse in J.Hector-S.Kudrin, Palma de Mallorca 1989) 9...♗d7 10 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 11 ♕xb4 d5 (the point) 12 ♗xf6 gxf6 13 c5 a5 14 ♕c3 dxe4 15 ♖d1 ♕d5 left Black clearly better in H.Huenerkopf-M.Chandler, German League 1986.

B1)

1 e4 c5 2 b4 cxb4 3 a3

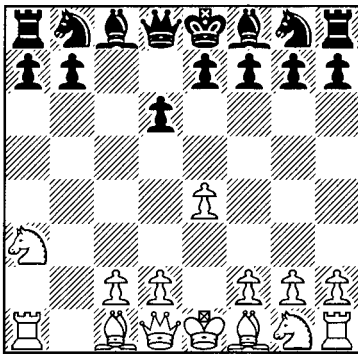
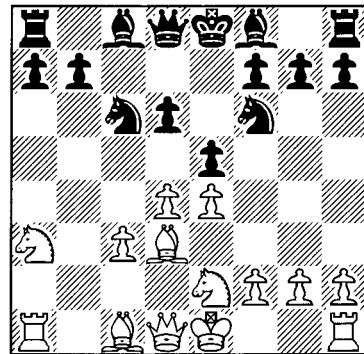
White's main continuation and a move which may be due for something of a renaissance, at least at club level, after being recommended in Nigel Davies' recent *Gambiteer* repertoire.

3...d5!?

This remains both quite critical and the main line, but can 3...bxa3 really be so bad? It doesn't always get a good press, but that's largely because Black usually follows up with an inappropriate ...d5. Much better is to develop more slowly and solidly, beginning with ...d6:

a) 4 d4 d6 usually transposes to variation 'c' after 5 ♘xa3, although recently the slightly strange 5 ♘d2 was preferred in K.Shirazi-M.Oleksienko, Cappelle la Grande 2007, when Black decided that White's set-up was slow enough for him to adopt a Pirc approach: 5...g6 6 ♘gf3 ♗g7 7 h3 ♘c6 8 c3 ♘f6 9 d5 ♘b8 10 ♖xa3 0-0 11 c4 ♘bd7

12 ♗b2 ♘c5 and Black stood well.

b) 4 ♗xa3 was once employed by Capablanca, but after 4...d6 5 ♘f3 (more usual is the immediate 5 d4 when 5...♘f6 6 ♗d3 ♘c6 7 c3 gives Black a reasonable choice between 7...g6 and 7...e6 8 ♘e2 ♗e7 9 0-0, F.Frink-P.Kubin, Tatranske Zruby 2006, 9...0-0 10 ♘d2 e5 with a good game) 5...♘c6 (restricting White's options with 5...♘f6 is probably a more accurate move order) 6 d4 g6!? (the fianchetto isn't a bad idea in general, as we've seen, and here is as good a way as any to counter White's idea of 7 d5) 7 h4?! ♗g4 8 c3 ♗g7 9 ♘bd2 ♘f6 10 ♕b3 ♕b6 11 ♕a2 ♗xf3 12 gxf3 ♘h5 Black was doing well and the legendary Cuban virtually unrecognisable in J.Capablanca-R.Black, New York 1911.

c) 4 ♘xa3 d6

5 d4 (White's main response to 3...bxa3; alternatively, 5 ♗c4 ♘f6 6 ♗b2 ♘c6 7 ♕e2 e6 8 ♘f3 ♗e7 9 0-0 0-0 was a good example of the Scheveningen set-up Black can aim for in R.Spielmann-H.Gebhard, Munich 1926, and after 10 ♘b5, 10...d5! would have liberated Black's position with advantage) 5...♘f6 6 ♗d3 e5!? (striking back in the centre, although depending on taste Black may wish to prefer a set-up with either 6...e6 7 ♘f3 ♗e7 or 6...g6; after the latter, 7 ♘e2 ♗g7 8 0-0 0-0 9 c3 e5! 10 f4 exd4 11 cxd4 ♘c6 wasn't too clear in W.Stroeher-V.Kupreichik, Passau 1993, although I'd be happy to take Black with his extra pawn and prospects of undermining White's centre, but 7 f4!? might be more critical when 7...♗g7 8 ♘f3 0-0 9 0-0 ♘c6 10 c3 ♗g4 11 h3 ♗xf3 12 ♕xf3 ♕a5 saw White's centre supply some compensation for the pawn in the game V.Grabinsky-O.Kovalenko, Alushta 2002) 7 c3 (White usually bolsters his centre so, whereas 7 ♘f3 ♗e7 8 0-0 ♘c6!? 9 d5 ♘b4 10 ♗b5+ ♗d7 11 ♕e2 0-0 12 ♗c4 ♘a6! fixed it and gave Black good queenside prospects in M.Dorn-V.Simagin, Vienna 1953) 7...♘c6 8 ♘e2

8...d5!? (blowing open the centre, although there's no real need for this; practice has shown that the more solid 8...♗e7 9 0-0 0-0, intending 10 f4 ♗g4, offers Black reasonable prospects of slowing putting his extra pawn to good

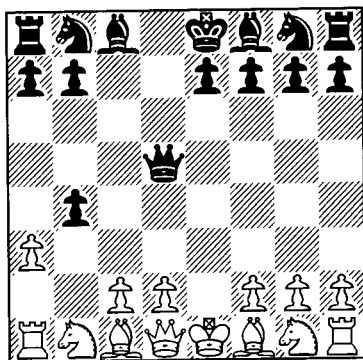
use) 9 exd5 ♘xd5 10 c4?! (10 0-0!? is probably a better try, hoping to stir up some trouble with something like 10...exd4 11 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 12 cxd4 ♗e7 13 ♕h5) 10...♗b4+!? (improving over the not unreasonable 10...♘db4 of A.Zajarnyi-S.Fuks, Lvov 1999) 11 ♗d2 ♘f4! 12 ♘xf4 ♗xd2+ 13 ♕xd2 ♕xd4 14 0-0 ♕xf4 sees Black bag a second pawn and stand well.

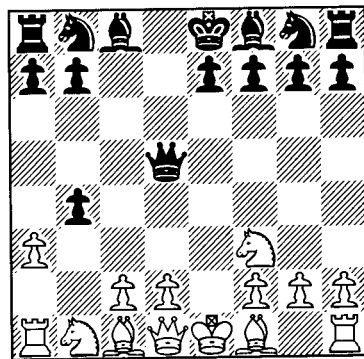
Capturing on a3 isn't fashionable or recommended to those who like to strive for the initiative, but it does look like a decent alternative to our main line. The fact that Black has fairly successfully followed up ...d6 with a number of different piece deployments suggests that the onus is on White here.

Returning to 3...d5:

4 exd5

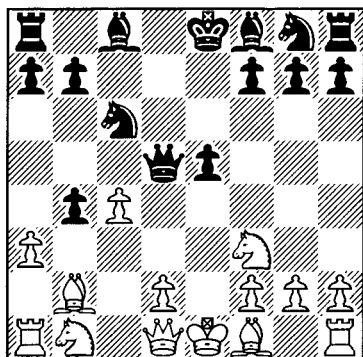
Striving to open and complicate the position. The alternative 4 e5 transposes after 4...♘c6 5 d4 to Line B.

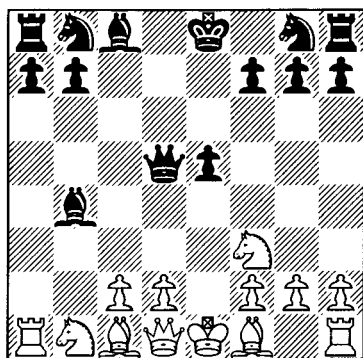
4...♕xd5

5 ♘f3

White's other method of saving his rook is 5 ♗b2. Black should still fight for the centre with 5...e5 when White's best is probably 6 ♘f3, transposing to the note to his 6th move in our main line. Less impressive is 6 axb4 ♗xb4 7 ♘a3 (or 7 ♘c3 ♗xc3 8 ♗xc3 ♘c6 9 ♘f3 ♘ge7 10 ♗e2 0-0 11 0-0 f6 12 d4 e4 13 ♘d2 b5 and White was struggling badly for compensation in R.Spielmann-F.Sämisch, Marienbad 1925) 7...♘c6 8 ♘b5 ♕d8 (the prudent retreat to d8 is usually the best way of countering ♘b5 in this variation) 9 ♘f3 ♘f6 10 ♗e2 0-0 11 0-0 ♖e8 12 d4 when White was doing little more than thrash around in B.Gulko-H.Pohla, Tallinn 1977, and after 12...exd4 13 ♘fxd4 ♗d7 14 ♘xc6, Rogozenko's 14...♗xc6! 15 ♘xa7 ♕xd1 16 ♗xd1 ♗d5 sees Black return the pawn to retain some advantage in view of the awkward threat of 17...♗c4.

5...e5!

It's not just White who is allowed to control the centre in this variation. Indeed Black should develop quickly and actively, often being prepared to return the extra material or even more to seize the initiative.

6 axb4

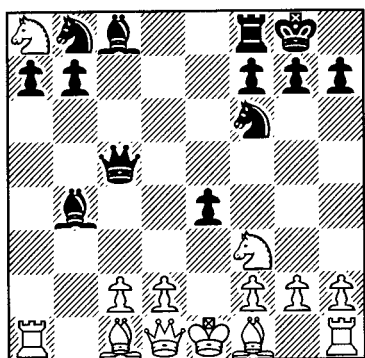
Probably White's best way of gaining some play for his pawn is 6 ♗b2 ♘c6 7 c4!?. This has blown away no less a player than Malaniuk, although I think that Black should be able to gain quite a reasonable game with a little accuracy:

7...♛e4+! 8 ♗e2 ♘f6 9 0-0 bxa3 (a good alternative and one which avoids too much liquidation is 9...♛f4!? 10 d4 e4 11 ♘e5 ♘xe5 12 dxe5 ♘g4 13 ♗xg4 ♛xg4 14 ♛d5 ♗e7 when Black's bishop-pair ensures that he isn't worse, A.Robertshaw-M.Wochnik, correspondence 1997) 10 ♘xa3 ♗c5 11 ♘xe5 (White uses a trick to regain the pawn and this is probably best; alternatively, 11 ♖e1 0-0 12 ♗f1 ♛f4 favoured Black even before White fell for 13 ♗xe5? ♘xe5 14 ♖xe5 ♗xf2+! in A.Zajarnyi-J.Zezulkin, Polanica Zdroj 1997, and 11 d4 exd4 12 ♗d3 ♛g4 13 h3 ♛h5 14 ♖e1+ ♗e6 15 ♘b5, J.Sonnet-T.Meynard, French League 2002, is also promising for Black after Martin's calm suggestion of 15...0-0) 11...♘xe5 12 d4 0-0 (now the game can fizzle out to an extent, but 12...♗h3!? 13 gxh3 ♖d8 14 ♛a4+ ♔f8 15 dxc5 ♛g6+ 16 ♔h1 ♛e4+ is an immediate draw) 13 dxe5 (the later 13 dxc5!? ♗g4 14 ♗xg4 ♘fxg4 15 ♗xe5 ♘xe5 16 ♖e1 ♛f4! 17 ♛d6 of Y.Zherebukh-R.Shetty, Pardubice 2005, would have been at least fine for Black after 17...♖fe8 18 ♖ad1 h6!? followed by 19...♖e6) 13...♘g4 14 ♗f3 ♛f4 15 g3 ♛f5 was unclear in M.Hrabinska-K.Rohonyan, Lvov 2003.

6...♗xb4

7 c3

White has ideas of d4 and can also now meet ...e4 with ♘d4. Alternatively:

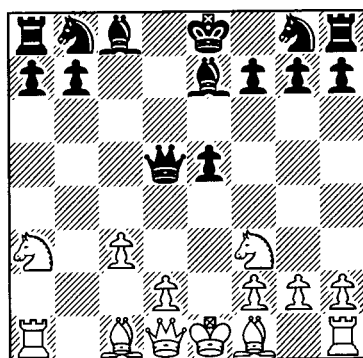
a) 7 ♗a3 ♗xa3 8 ♖xa3 (or 8 ♘xa3 ♘c6 9 ♘b5 ♛d8 when Davies points out both that White can regain his pawn with 10 ♘xe5!? ♘xe5 11 ♛e2 and that this is far from troubling for Black after 11...♘e7 12 ♛xe5 0-0; continuing this a little we find 13 ♗e2 ♘g6! 14 ♛g3 when White has prevented any kingside activity with ...♛g5, but Black still gains the advantage with 14...♗d7 15 0-0 ♗xb5 16 ♗xb5 ♛xd2) 8...♘c6 9 ♘c3 ♛d6 10 ♘b5 ♛e7 sees the exchange of dark-squared bishops only really help Black develop smoothly: 11 ♛a1 ♘f6 12

♗c4 0-0 13 0-0 ♗g4 didn't give White anything for his pawn in J.Podgorny-L.Pachman, Prague 1953, and neither is 11 ♖e3!? (J.Engbersen-J.Simmelink, correspondence 1974) much of an improvement after 11...♘f6 12 d4 ♘d5 or 12 ♗c4 0-0 13 0-0 e4! 14 d3 ♘a5.

b) 7 ♘a3 ♘f6!? (this sacrificial continuation is rather promising, although a reasonable and calm alternative is 7...♘c6 after which 8 ♘b5 ♕d8 9 c3 ♗e7 10 d4!? e4 should be fine for Black) 8 ♘b5 (critical; White has also tried 8 ♗c4, but after the 8...♕e4+ 9 ♗e2 0-0 10 ♘b5 of R.Erkens-A.Kruger, correspondence 1993, one good continuation is 10...♘d5!? 11 c3 ♗e7 12 d3 ♕f5 13 c4 ♗d7 and Black is better) 8...0-0! 9 ♘c7 ♕c5 10 ♘xa8 e4

11 ♘g1 (not ideal, but Black had a venomous initiative for the rook in any case and 11 ♘h4 e3! 12 fxe3 ♕xe3+ 13 ♕e2 ♕d4 is also rather promising) 11...♘g4! (even stronger than Gallagher's suggestion of 11...♖e8!? 12 c3 ♘g4 13 ♘h3 e3) 12 ♘h3 (pretty forced since 12 ♕e2 e3 13 fxe3 ♘xe3 14 ♖a2 ♖e8 gives Black a winning attack – Rogozenko) 12...e3 13 ♗d3 (it has been suggested that White might do better with 13 ♗e2 exd2+ 14 ♗xd2 ♖d8 15 ♗d3 ♕e5+ 16 ♔f1, but this also looks horrible for him after 16...♗xd2; Black has won back a piece, leaving both White's king and a8-knight rather misplaced) 13...♘xf2 14 ♘xf2 exf2+ 15 ♔f1 ♖e8 was crushing in J.Madsen-E.Barfoed, correspondence 1994.

7...♗e7

By no means the only option, but this is the safest retreat and one which does much to spoil White's fun.

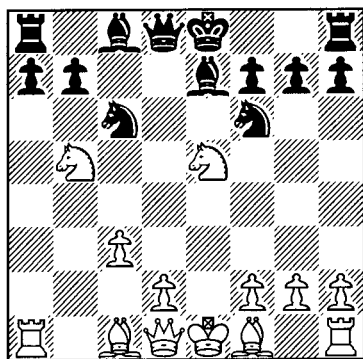
8 ♘a3

8...♘f6!

Black is prepared to return the pawn to pursue the initiative and this is probably best. Gallagher's alternative suggestion of 8...♘c6!? has now received some tests, but unfortunately White can force a draw with 9 ♘b5 (back in 1994, Gallagher mainly analysed 9 ♗c4 ♕e4+ 10 ♔f1!? and after 10...♗g4 I'd certainly prefer to be Black in this messy position) 9...♕d8 10 d4! (10 ♗c4 e4 11 ♘fd4 ♘f6 12 ♘xc6 bxc6 left the a-pawn taboo and Black doing

well in C.Langer-M.Dehne, Dortmund 2001) 10...exd4 11 ♗f4 (and not 11 cxd4?!, as in A.Selva Salvador-F.Bixquert Jimenez, Valencia 1996, when White will be driven backwards after 11...♘f6, such as with 12 ♗e2 0-0 13 0-0 ♗f5 followed by ...a6 with a sound extra pawn) 11...♔f8 12 ♘c7 ♖b8 13 ♘b5 ♖a8, as indeed he did in W.Goebl-F.Krewett, correspondence 1998.

9 ♘b5 ♕d8 10 ♘xe5

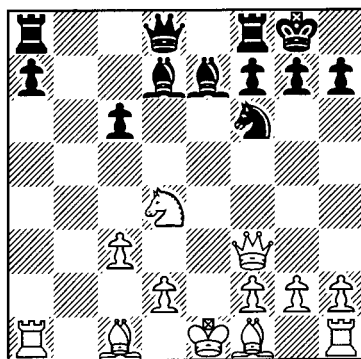
Perhaps White should take the other pawn and 10 ♖xa7!? ♖xa7 11 ♘xa7 e4 12 ♘d4 ♗d7 (U.Neumann-S.Richkov, correspondence 2002) 13 ♗e2 ♕b6 14 ♘ab5 does, as Davies points out, give White good squares for his knights. However, Black remains slightly the more active here and isn't worse in the unclear position arising after 14...♘c6 15 0-0 15...0-0 16 d3 ♘xd4 17 ♘xd4 ♗d6.

10...♘c6

11 ♘xc6

As this fails to win a second pawn, perhaps White should prefer 11 d4, although after 11...0-0 12 ♗d3 ♘xe5 13 dxe5 ♘g4 14 ♗f4 ♗g5 Black is slightly better since White's pawns and pieces are a little loose.

11...bxc6 12 ♕f3

And not, of course, 12 ♖xa7? ♖xa7 13 ♘xa7 ♗d7 trapping the knight.

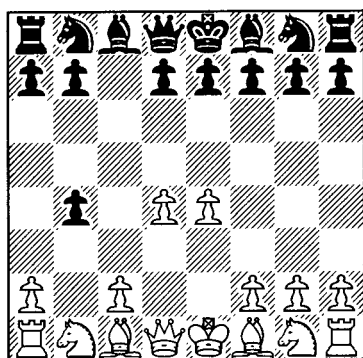
12...♗d7 13 ♘d4 0-0

Black has returned the gambit pawn to gain a lead in development and White remains the side still looking to equalize. The theoretically important K.Lutz-N.De Firmian, Biel 1993 (the stem game for 8...♘f6), continued 14 ♗a6 ♕c7 15 h3 c5 16 ♘f5 ♕e5+ 17 ♘e3 ♗d6! with a strong initiative and some advantage for Black. A more critical test is 14 ♘xc6!?, but after 14...♕e8! (Gallagher's 14...♗xc6 15 ♕xc6 ♖e8 is also promising) 15 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7+ 16 ♗e2 (16 ♕e3? ♖fe8 17 ♕xe7 ♖xe7+ 18 ♔d1 ♘g4 makes matters worse for White) 16...♖fe8 White's defence of e2 is hanging by a fragile thread.

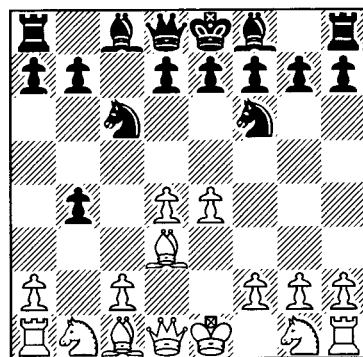
Due to a number of previously neglected correspondence games and unexplored possibilities, this section wasn't always especially easy to write. The good news for Black is that he re-

mains at least OK after 7...♗e7 in the main line and even 6 ♗b2 ♘c6 7 c4!? shouldn't be too problematic after 7...♕e4+!.

B2)

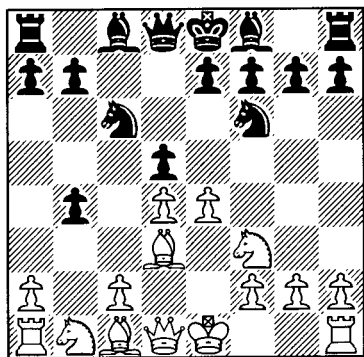
1 e4 c5 2 b4 cxb4 3 d4

White wastes no time in constructing his ideal centre, but as we've already seen, Black too can contest the centre.

3...d5

The main line and, I imagine, the move probably most familiar to the reader. The text is in good theoretical shape, but those new to this variation or seeking something simpler would do well to consider 3...♘f6!?. Black's GM-endorsed plan is fairly obvious: to develop with tempo against White's centre, while hoping to lure it forwards with the aim of then breaking it up; a typical hypermodern strategy. Play can continue 4 ♗d3 (best, whereas 4 ♗c4?! ♘xe4! 5 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 6 ♕h5+ g6 7 ♕d5+ e6 8 ♕xe4 ♘c6 9 ♘f3 d5 is pretty good for Black and 4 e5 ♘d5 leaves White's centre vulnerable to a c3-Sicilian-style undermining ...d6; for example, 5 ♘f3 e6 6 ♗d3 d6 7 a3 ♘c6 8 exd6 ♗xd6 and White was beginning to struggle for compensation in G.Kadas-T.Borsavolgyi, Hajduboszormeny 1997) 4...♘c6 (another approach is 4...d6!?, intending to follow up with either ...g6 or the Epishin-endorsed ...e5; one reason why 3...♘f6 might not have been more popular back in the Twenties is the old exhibition game, A.Alekhine-C.Portela, Buenos Aires 1926: 5 f4 e5 6 ♘f3 exd4 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 ♕e1! and White had some play for his pawns, but why did Black reject 5...d5! 6 e5 ♘e4? – I can't see a good reason) and now:

a) 5 ♘e2 d6! (one advantage of 3...♘f6 is the flexibility which it gives Black; here 5...d5 wasn't so effective, but with White's knight on e2, it makes a lot of sense to switch to a Pirc set-up) 6 0-0 g6 7 ♘d2 ♗g7 8 f4 (White has to try something, but his central control isn't that good here and one can't help but feel that the position is unclear, except that Black has a useful extra pawn) 8...0-0 9 ♔h1 ♗g4 10 ♗b2 (finally White is ready to roll with 11 d5)

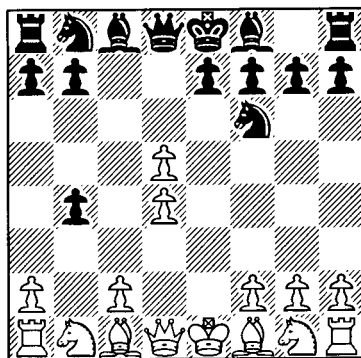
10...♘d7! 11 ♘f3 ♘c5 saw Black playing well and instructively against and around the white centre to gain a clear advantage in H.Jurkovic-S.Dvoirys, Oberwart 1999.

b) 5 e5 ♘d5 6 ♗e4!? is a try, although after 6...e6 7 ♘f3 (7 ♗xd5?! exd5 8 ♘f3 d6 undoubles the pawns with effect) 7...d6 8 0-0 ♗e7 (B.Schneider-A.Schenk, German League 2004), Black just seems to have a favourable version of the c3 Sicilian.

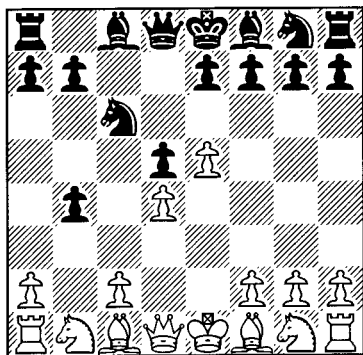
c) 5 ♘f3 d5!

6 e5 (or 6 exd5 ♘xd5 7 0-0 g6 with easy development and the advantage) 6...♘e4 (now we get to see why White's knight is often a little misplaced on f3 should Black be able to get his light-squared bishop out before the centre fully closes) 7 0-0 ♗g4 8 ♗b2 e6 9 ♕e2 ♘g5 10 ♘bd2 ♗e7 gave Black an excellent French-type position in C.Philippe-K.Lerner, Metz 1996.

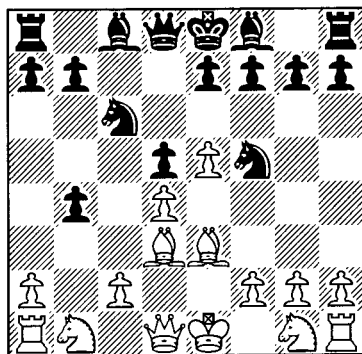
Before returning to our main line, it's worth mentioning that those with some French experience can also consider meeting 3 d4 with 3...e6 since 4 a3 d5 5 e5 leads to the French version of the Wing Gambit.

4 e5

Even though this lets Black's light-squared bishop out, White really has to try it. The alternative 4 exd5 ♘f6 gives Black a good version of the Scandinavian:

5 ♗b5+ (or 5 ♘f3 ♘xd5 6 ♗c4 ♗g4 7 0-0 e6 8 a3 ♘c6 9 axb4 ♗xb4 and Black was simply a pawn up in S.Quist-F.Zeller, Böblingen 1995, while the more creative 5 c4!? bxc3 6 ♕a4+ ♗d7 7 ♕b3 c2! 8 ♘c3 ♕b6 9 ♕xc2 ♘a6 still worked out well for Black in K.Bolding-L.Vasilescu, French League 1997) 5...♘bd7!? (a good alternative to the older, more established and also quite promising 5...♗d7 6 ♗c4 ♗g4 7 f3 ♗f5 8 a3 ♘xd5 of A.Ozsvath-E.Varnusz, Hungary 1973) 6 c4 (or 6 a3!? ♕a5 7 ♕e2 ♘xd5 8 ♘f3 a6 9 ♗d3, as in C.Depasquale-S.Booth, Melbourne 1989, and now 9...g6 10 0-0 ♗g7 11 ♖e1 0-0 leaves Black better) 6...bxc3 7 ♘xc3 a6 8 ♗xd7+ (this doesn't help, but 8 ♗d3 ♘b6 9 d6 exd6 10 ♘ge2 ♗e7 11 0-0 0-0 hardly gave White anything for his pawn in F.Schlag-P.Benko, Bad

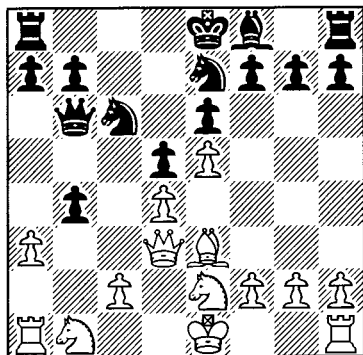
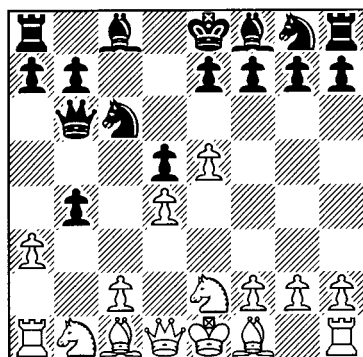
Wörishofen 1992) 8...♕xd7 9 ♕b3 e6! (the practical approach, although I think Black can also get away with 9...♕g4!?) 10 dxe6 ♕xe6+ 11 ♘ge2 ♕xb3 12 axb3 ♗e6 saw Black prudently return the pawn in order to secure the bishop-pair, good activity and the superior structure in C.Depasquale-V.Ravikumar, London 1986.

4...♘c6

5 a3

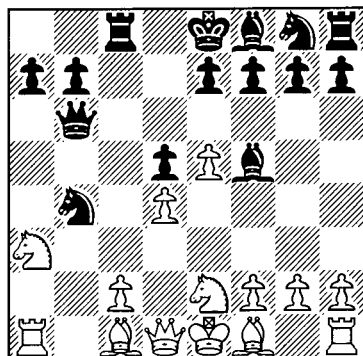
White usually feels the need to play this, if only because the b4-pawn exerts quite a cramping influence on his queenside. He doesn't have to, though, and 5 ♗e3 is occasionally tried, after which I like 5...♘h6!? (bringing the knight to f5, although the more standard 5...♗f5 is also quite good: 6 ♘e2 e6 7 ♘g3 is probably White's best when 7...♗g6 8 h4!? has brought him some compensation, although I have my doubts that it's sufficient after 8...f6!; another option is 7...♘ge7 8 ♘d2 ♕b6!? challenging White to find a good move and after, for example, 9 ♗e2 ♗g6 10 h4 h6 11 h5 ♗h7 12 ♘b3 ♘f5 13 ♘xf5 ♗xf5 White probably hasn't enough, since ...♘a5 and even ...0-0-0 are at Black's disposal, while 14 g4 ♗h7 15 f4 is well met by 15...♗e4) 6 ♗d3 (White has also tried 6 a3 ♘f5 7 axb4 ♘xb4 8 c3 when Black might play 8...♘xe3!? 9 fxe3 ♘c6 10 ♘f3 ♗g4, intending ...e6, which is a good counter to any c4 ideas, ...♗e7 and then to bring the light-squared bishop round to g6) 6...♘f5

7 ♘f3 g6! (blunting the d3-bishop and preparing, after an exchange on e3, dark-square counterplay with ...f6 and/or ...♗h6) 8 0-0 ♗g7 9 a3 0-0 10 axb4 ♘xe3 11 fxe3 ♘xb4 and Black was somewhat better in R.Huettemann-S.Jeric, Feffernitz 2005.

5...♕b6 6 ♘e2

White doesn't want to have his knight pinned on f3 and the text is theoretically his main move. The other option being 6 ♗e3, a speciality of the Hungarian player, Ferenc Frink, although after 6...♗f5 7 ♗d3 (the exchange of bishops is quite helpful for Black, but White's problem is that 7 g4 ♗e4! 8 f3 ♗g6 is quite awkward since both 9...♘xe5 and 9...h5 are threatened, and even 9 e6 fxe6 10 ♗d3 ♗xd3 11

♕xd3 e5! failed to help White in K.Orienter-E.Gruenfeld, Vienna 1946) 7...♗xd3 8 ♕xd3 e6 9 ♘e2 ♘ge7

10 0-0 ♘f5 11 axb4 I'd still rather be Black: for example, 11...♗xb4 (Black should also consider preventing White from bolstering his centre with c3; that can be done with 11...♘xb4 12 ♕b3 ♕b5!? which deserves a test) 12 c3 ♗e7 13 ♘d2 ♕d8 14 g4 ♘xe3 15 fxe3 0-0 16 ♘f4 (F.Frink-I.Madl, Zalakaros 2003) 16...♕d7 17 e4 (otherwise ...f6 occurs) 17...♗g5! and White's half-open files supply no more than a little compensation for the pawn.

6...♗f5

Black can also opt to lure White's pawns forward with the Gallagher-endorsed 6...♗g4!? 7 f3 ♗f5, but I've always liked the text, even if theory has sometimes (and wrongly in my view) been a little dismissive of it.

7 axb4 ♘xb4 8 ♘a3 ♖c8

9 ♘f4

Critical. White needs to at least be attacking d5, whereas 9 ♘g3 ♘xc2+ 10 ♘xc2 ♗xc2 11 ♕g4 e6 12 ♗e2 ♗b4+ 13 ♔f1 ♗g6 didn't give him anywhere near enough play for the two pawns in I.Al Hadhrani-H.Hamdouchi, Novi Sad Olympiad 1990.

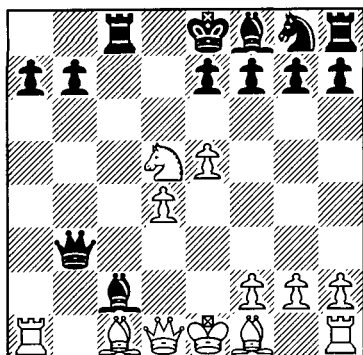
9...♘xc2+!

Black has tried a number of moves here, but the forcing text is simple and strong. For a time White was considered to have some compensation here in view of 9...♗xc2 10 ♕g4 e6 11 ♗b5+ ♘c6 (11...♔d8!? might be more critical) 12 ♘xd5 ♕d8 13 ♘xc2 ♕xd5 14 ♖b1 (S.Mariotti-G.Kuzmin, Leningrad 1977), but Black should prefer to force exchanges.

10 ♘xc2 ♗xc2 11 ♘xd5

White recently, and rather desper-

ately, tried 11 ♕f3?, but after 11...e6 12 ♗d2 ♗b4 13 ♕e3 ♘e7 14 ♗d3 ♗xd2+ 15 ♕xd2 ♗xd3 16 ♕xd3 ♕b4+ he was just two clear pawns in arrears in J.Martinez Gil-H.Hermesmann, Cullera 2005.

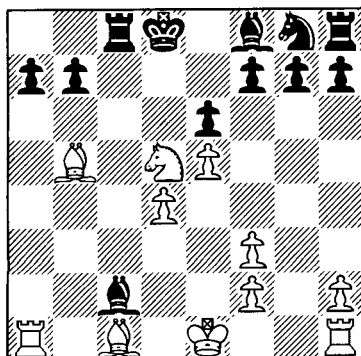
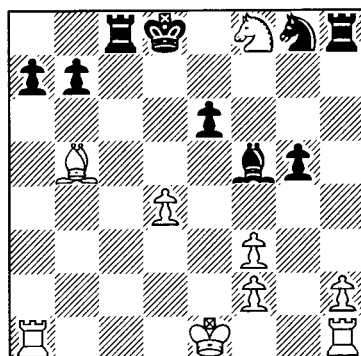
11...♕b3

The point of Black's play. White can't avoid the exchange of queens; a fact emphasized by P.Laub-S.Savchenko, Lausanne 2003: 12 ♕g4?? e6 and White might have resigned rather than play 13 ♕f3; his problem is that he cannot move the d5-knight without dropping the rook on a1.

12 ♕f3 ♕xf3 13 gxf3

A recent try, although 13 ♗b5+ ♔d8 14 gxf3 actually just transposes after 14...e6. For a while it was believed that Black was doing well here due to Liangov's suggestion of 14...a6?!, but after Caprano's 15 ♘b6! White actually has rather dangerous compensation, as borne out by some of his correspondence games.

13...e6!

Again 13...a6 14 ♘b6 is a little awkward since 14...♖c6? fails to 15 ♗b5.

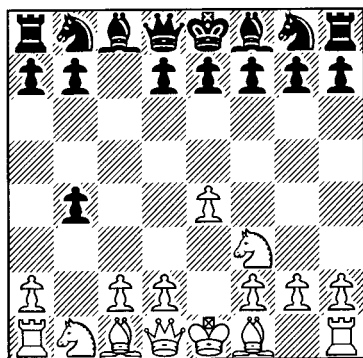
14 ♗b5+ ♔d8

I'm struggling to see enough compensation for White here. F.Lavoisier-J.Bertrand, correspondence 1995, continued 15 ♗g5+ f6! (this required some calculation, but is good; otherwise White regains his pawn on a7 when he might be able to salvage a draw) 16 exf6 gxf6 17 ♘xf6 h6 (the point; 18 ♗h4 is now well met by 18...♗e7) 18 ♘d7+ hxg5 19 ♘xf8 ♗f5 (19...♔e7!? 20 ♘d7 a6 21 ♘b6 ♖c7 22 ♗e2 ♘h6 is a simpler and promising alternative)

20 ♘d7?! (he had to try 20 ♗d7!? ♘e7, although after both 21 ♗xc8 ♘xc8 22 ♘xe6+ ♗xe6 and 21 ♗xe6 ♖xf8 22

♗xc8 ♗xc8 Black's two minor pieces for the rook give him all the chances that are going due to White's numerous weak pawns) 20...a6 21 ♘b6 ♖c2 22 ♗a4 ♖c3 and Black's far superior structure carried the day.

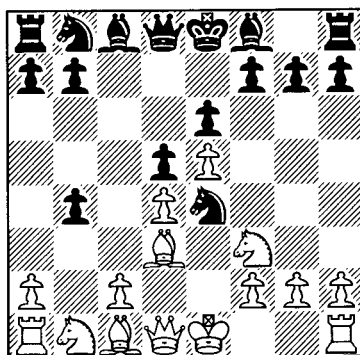
The theoretical pendulum has swung somewhat over 6...♗f5, but I find it hard to believe that White has sufficient compensation so long as Black is accurate in our main line. Those after a quieter life, as well as those for whom facing the Wing Gambit is a rare occurrence, should investigate the simpler and no less promising 3...♘f6.

B3)

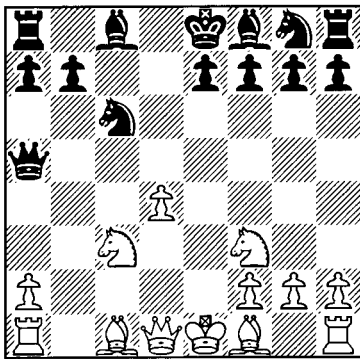
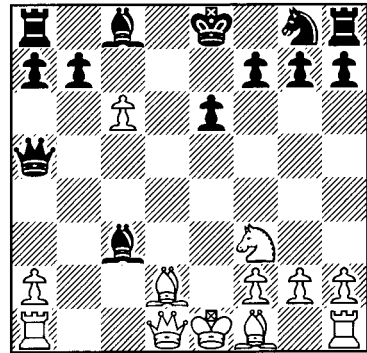
1 e4 c5 2 b4 cxb4 3 ♘f3

This is actually quite rare here, but it's still worth considering what follows in some detail, if only so that Black combines his preparation for the Wing Gambit with that for the Wing Gambit Deferred, i.e. 2 ♘f3 before 3 b4.

3...d5

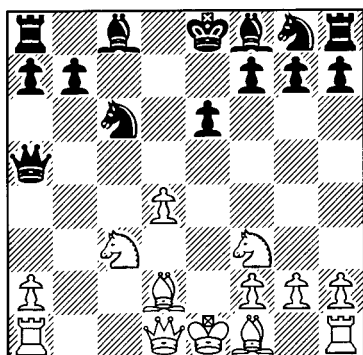
In this exact position, the text is quite promising, although Black can also consider:

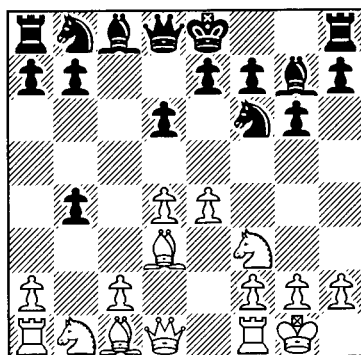
a) 3...e6 4 d4 (4 a3 is also quite well met by 4...♘f6!?; for example, 5 e5 ♘d5 6 axb4 ♗xb4 7 c3 ♗e7 8 d4 d6 9 ♗d3 ♘d7 saw Black in true c3-Sicilian-style undermining White's centre in M.Frohberg-G.Siegel, Bremen 1998) 4...♘f6! (a promising approach, although some may prefer 4...d5 5 e5 taking play into a French Wing Gambit and one in which White is sometimes advised not to have played d4 so early) 5 ♗d3 (now Black gets to counter in the centre, but 5 e5 ♘d5 6 ♗d3 d6 again looks like an unfavourable c3 Sicilian for White; the logical 7 0-0 ♗e7 8 a3 dxe5 9 dxe5 0-0 10 ♕e2 ♘d7 11 ♖d1 ♕c7 12 ♕e4 g6 13 axb4 ♘xb4 14 ♘a3 ♘xd3 15 cxd3 ♘c5 certainly worked out well for Black in A.Zapolskis-A.Kveinys, Vilnius 2004) 5...d5 6 e5 ♘e4

7 0-0 (White can win back his pawn with 7 ♕e2, but Black is more than happy to return it for all the light squares and after 7...♗d7 8 0-0 ♗e7 9 a3 ♘a6! he was better in M.Narmontas-S.Sulskis, Siauliai 2005) 7...♗e7 (as Black isn't in a hurry to castle kingside,

focusing first on the queenside with Skomorokhin's 7...b6!? makes a fair amount of sense) 8 ♕e2 was V.Vaisman-F.Gheorghiu, Romania 1978, and now 8...♘c3 9 ♘xc3 bxc3 10 ♖b1 ♘c6 11 ♖b3! 0-0 12 ♖xc3 f5! 13 exf6 ♗xf6 14 ♗a3 gave White sufficient activity for his pawn. Black need not be so materialistic, though, and I would prefer 8...♗d7!?, à la Sulskis, being happy to return the pawn on e4 for a good game.

b) 3...♘c6 4 d4 is probably the sharpest of these Wing Gambits (via a 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 b4 move order, 3...♘xb4!? 4 c3 ♘c6 5 d4 d5 6 exd5 ♕xd5 becomes very much an option, with a c3 Sicilian in which Black has traded a tempo for an extra pawn), when Black often continues 4...d5 5 exd5 (the only try, since 5 e5?! ♗g4 6 ♗e2 e6 is clearly very comfortable for Black) 5...♕xd5 6 c4 bxc3 7 ♘xc3 ♕a5 and now:

b1) 8 d5 e6! (an important resource since 8...♘f6?! 9 dxc6 ♕xc3+ 10 ♗d2 ♕xc6 11 ♖c1 ♕e4+ 12 ♗e2 gives White plenty of play for his pawns) 9 ♗d2 (another move order is 9 dxc6 ♗b4 10 ♗d2, but not here 10 cxb7? ♗xc3+ 11 ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 12 ♕xd2 ♕xd2+ 13 ♔xd2 ♗xb7 14 ♗b5+ ♔e7 and White is just a clear pawn down) 9...♗b4 10 dxc6 (forcing the pace; White might also cover b3, but both 10 ♕b3 exd5 11 ♘xd5 ♗xd2+ 12 ♘xd2 ♘ge7, W.Roeseler-M.Schmidt, German League 1994, and 10 ♕c1!? exd5 11 a3 ♗d6 12 ♗b5 ♘ge7 13 ♘e4 ♕d8 14 ♘xd6+ ♕xd6 15 ♗b4 ♕f6 16 0-0 0-0 17 ♗xc6 bxc6 18 ♖e1 ♖e8 19 ♕c5 ♗e6, K.Shirazi-J.Bonin, New York 1990, have turned out well for Black) 10...♗xc3

11 c7!? (White must cause some confusion before Black completes his kingside development and the text looks like the only way of doing so; alternatives have been tried and unsurprisingly found failing with, for example, 11 ♗e2?! ♗xd2+ 12 ♘xd2 ♘e7 13 0-0 0-0 leaving Black a clear pawn ahead in J.Hvenekilde,-J.Nilssen, Tastrup 2000) 11...♗xd2+!? (11...♕xc7 12 ♗b5+ ♔e7 13 ♖c1 ♗xd2+ 14 ♕xd2 ♕d6 15 ♕g5+ gives White some play for his pawns, although it may not be enough) 12 ♕xd2 ♕xd2+ 13 ♔xd2 was M.Closs-

C.Duggan, Stockton 2006. This is probably White's trickiest try after 8 d5, but it's still hard to believe that Black isn't doing well. Bringing the knight to d5 looks like the way to handle things: 13...♔e7! (13...♗d7?! 14 ♖b1! caused Duggan some problems in the game) 14 ♗e2 (or 14 ♗c4 ♘f6 15 ♖ac1 ♗d7 16 ♘e5 ♖hc8 17 ♗b3 a5!, activating the rook with some advantage) 14...♘f6 15 ♘e5 ♘d5 16 ♖ac1 b6 17 ♗f3 ♗b7 18 ♖c4 ♖ac8 19 ♖hc1 f6 20 ♘d3 ♔d6 and White is struggling with ...♖he8-e7 next up.

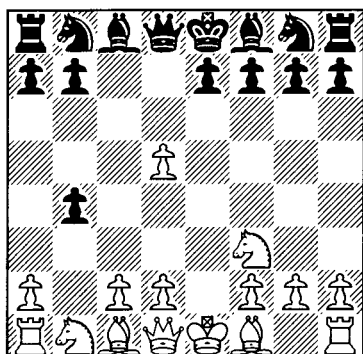
b2) 8 ♗d2 e6

9 ♗c4 (trying to force through d5; alternatively, 9 ♘b5!? ♕d8 10 ♗f4 ♗b4+ 11 ♘d2 ♔f8! prevents the threat and leaves d4 hanging, while 9 ♕b3 ♘f6 10 ♗c4 transposes to our next note) 9...♘f6 (Black should also consider 9...♗b4!?; for example, 10 ♕b3 ♘f6 11 0-0 0-0 12 a3 ♗xc3 13 ♗xc3 ♕h5 threatened ...♘a5 and didn't seem to give White quite enough for his pawn in P.Littlewood-G.Bennett, Portsmouth 1976) 10 d5?! (it might well be advisable to prepare this, although after 10 ♕b3 ♕d8 11 d5 exd5 12 ♘xd5, Black escapes with 12...♗d6 13 0-0 ♘xd5 14 ♗xd5 0-0) 10...♗b4! is similar to variation 'b1' and after 11 dxc6 ♗xc3 12 0-0 ♗xd2 13 ♘xd2 0-0 Black is somewhat better.

c) 3...d6 4 d4 ♘f6 5 ♗d3 g6 (Black decides to play a Pirc a pawn up; another set-up which casts doubt on the viability of this version of the Wing Gambit is 5...e6 6 0-0 ♗e7: for example, 7 ♘bd2 d5 8 e5 ♘fd7 9 ♘e1 ♘c6 10 ♕g4 0-0 11 ♘df3 f5! with an excellent version of the French for Black in M.Corden-S.Gligoric, Hastings 1969/70) 6 0-0 (the best try, whereas 6 c3 bxc3 7 ♘xc3 ♗g7 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♖b1 ♘c6 10 h3 b6 11 ♗g5 ♗b7 didn't give White much for his pawn in K.Rosenheim-S.Teichmeister, correspondence 2000) 6...♗g7

7 a3 bxa3 8 ♖xa3 (or 8 c4 and now I quite like Georgiev's undermining suggestion of 8...♗g4!?; for example, 9 ♘xa3 ♘c6 10 ♗e3 ♘d7 11 ♘c2 0-0 12 h3 ♗xf3 13 ♕xf3 e5 14 d5 ♘d4 15 ♘xd4 exd4 16 ♗d2 ♘e5 with good play for Black) 8...0-0 9 ♗g5 ♘c6 10 c3 d5! (Black more often strikes back with ...e5, but the position of White's pieces

is the factor which should determine which break to employ) 11 e5 ♘e4 12 ♗h4 f6 gave Black good central counterplay, not to mention an extra pawn in H.Kallio-M.Mosquera, Havana 2005.

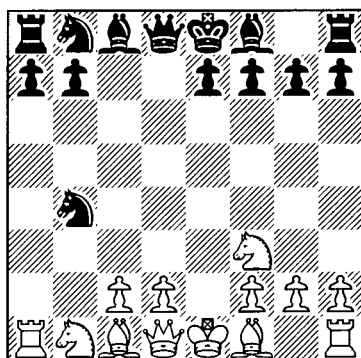
Returning to 3...d5:

4 exd5

The only real try, since 4 e5?! ♗g4 is already quite promising; for example, 5 ♗b5+ ♘c6 6 e6?! ♗xe6 7 ♘g5 ♗d7 8 d4 ♘f6 9 0-0 e6 and White didn't really have anything for his two pawns in R.Galleto-L.Duarte, Mar del Plata 2006.

4...♘f6!

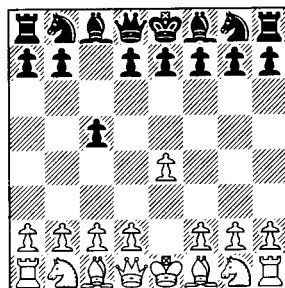
Now Black gets a well-placed knight on d5 and this is probably more promising than transposing to Line B1 after 4...♕xd5 5 a3.

5 a3 ♘xd5 6 axb4 ♘xb4

White doesn't have enough for his pawn here as shown by two games of A.R.B.Thomas:

7 ♗b2 ♘8c6 8 ♘a3 ♗f5 9 ♗e2 e6 10 0-0 ♗d6! left the g-pawn taboo and Black better in A.Thomas-S.Gligoric, Hastings 1951/52, and 7 d4 ♗f5 8 ♘a3 e6 9 ♗b5+ ♘8c6 10 c3 a6 11 ♗e2 ♘d5 was also good for Black in A.Thomas-L.Schmid, Hastings 1951/52.

Playing ♘f3 so early does not look like the best handling of the Wing Gambit, although Black still needs to be careful, especially if he reaches the position after 2 b4 cxb4 3 ♘f3 ♘c6.

Chapter Nine

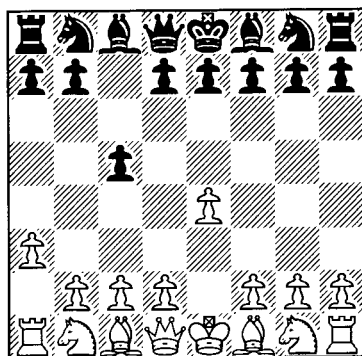
Miscellaneous

We now come to White's rather rare options. In this theory-laden modern era, even these have received some attention from a few grandmasters and especially from theoryophobe amateurs.

After 1 e4 c5, 2 ♗c4 is clearly misguided on account of 2...e6, thereby leaving White's remaining reasonable possibilities as:

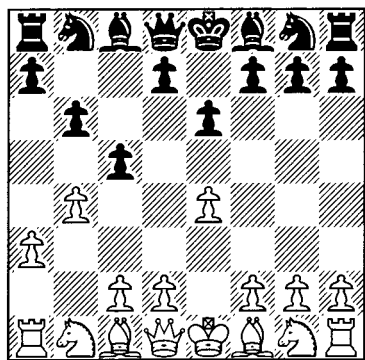
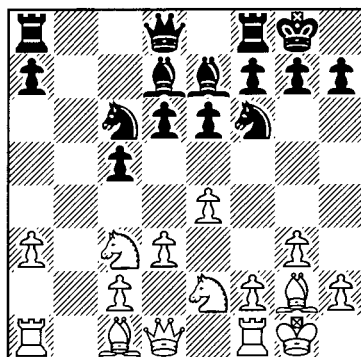
A: 2 a3
B: 2 ♘a3
C: 2 c4
D: 2 ♘e2

A)

1 e4 c5 2 a3

This attempt to gain a kind of improved Wing Gambit has recently gained some attention, due in no small part to the games and writings of the Russian GM, Alexei Bezgodov.

2...g6!

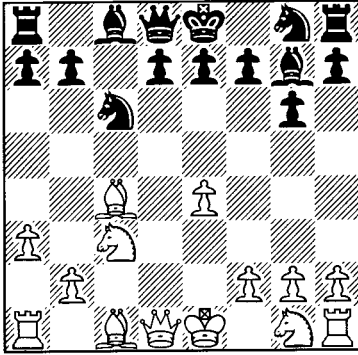
A prudent response and one which has been employed by the likes of Carlsen, Kotronias, Rublevsky and Wells. Black acknowledges that 2 a3 is a move he rarely faces, wisely avoids the complexities of 2...♘c6 3 b4 which White is no doubt pretty familiar with, and takes much of the sting out of White's intended queenside advance.

Another good option, along similar lines, is 2...e6 3 b4 b6!?.

To be frank, I'm not really sure what White is doing here: as the game progresses Black slightly better central control should count for something and he is most certainly no worse placed than White to play on the queenside should that flank open up. The recent game Y.Khalukov-D.Batsanin, Russian Team Championship 2007, continued: 4 bxc5 (perhaps 4 ♗b2 ♗b7 5 ♘c3 should be preferred, although after 5...♘c6 there is a definite threat to capture on b4 and 6 bxc5 bxc5 7 ♘f3 ♘d4! 8 ♗e2 ♘f6 9 d3 d5 gave Black an easy game in K.Lie-L.Johannessen, Norwegian Championship, Sandnes 2005; White's minor pieces collectively look a little misplaced here) 4...bxc5 5 ♘c3 (White has also tried 5 ♘f3 ♘c6 6 d4!? cxd4 7 c3, but I'm not convinced that this is an improved Morra; Black might well capture on c3 and a good alternative is 7...♘f6!? 8 e5 ♘d5 9 cxd4 ♖b8 10 ♗d3 ♗a6!, already taking advantage of the open queenside lines to gain an improved version of the c3 Sicilian) 5...♘c6 (another sensible approach was revealed in F.Sanz Alonso-P.San Segundo Carrillo, Elgoibar 1999: 5...g6 6 g3 ♗g7 7 ♗g2 ♘c6 8 ♘ge2 ♖b8 9 0-0 ♘ge7 10 d3 0-0 11 ♗f4 d6 with a standard Closed Sicilian set-up and with the b-file already open) 6 g3 d6 7 ♗g2 ♗d7 8 ♘ge2 ♘f6 9 0-0 ♗e7 10 d3 0-0

11 h3 ♖b8 12 ♗e3 ♕a5! and Black's queenside play was much more potent than anything White could produce on the kingside. Quite simply, once the b-file has opened, White seems to struggle for a good plan.

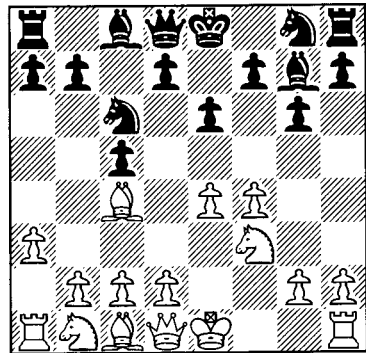
3 b4

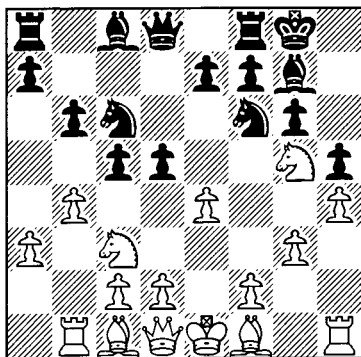
Consistent, but quite possibly White should change approach and indeed he has resorted to trying all manner of different set-ups:

a) 3 d4 cxd4 4 c3 (taking play into a line of the Morra, but with an early a3; quite possibly, though, this is best since 4 ♕xd4?! ♘f6 5 ♗b5 a6 6 e5 axb5 7 exf6 ♘c6 8 ♕e3 e6 gave Black an excellent version of the hyper-accelerated Dragon, especially after 9 ♘c3?! b4! which neatly exploited the pinned a-pawn in S.Williams-P.Wells, British Rapidplay Championship, Halifax 2004) 4...dxc3!? (I can't see any reason to shy

away from this, although several alternatives are quite comfortable for Black: 4...d5, 4...♘f6 and Carlsen's 4...♗g7 5 ♘f3 d3) 5 ♘xc3 ♗g7 6 ♗c4 ♘c6

7 ♘f3 ♘f6! (already making good use of the inclusion of a3 and ...♘f6 over a standard fianchetto Morra; there White would usually have made a dangerous e4-e5 advance by now) 8 e5!? (this might not convince, but otherwise 8 h3 d6 9 0-0 0-0 simply gave White a pawn-down version of the Dragon in P.Klings-L.Ortega, Porto San Giorgio 2005) 8...♘g4 9 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 10 ♘g5+ ♔g8 11 ♕xg4 ♗xe5 12 0-0 d5!? (the calm 12...♔g7 also leaves White's compensation looking insufficient) 13 ♕f3 ♗f5 14 g4! h6! 15 gxf5 hxg5 was messy but promising for Black in B.Knoeppel-R.Bocanegra, correspondence 2005, since even the critical 16 fxg6!? ♕e8 17 ♕xd5+ ♔g7 leaves White's king in the greater danger.

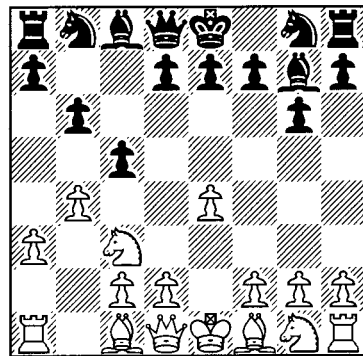
b) 3 c3 transposes to a 2 c3 Sicilian, against which ...g6 systems are fairly fashionable and in which White has decided to play the rather irrelevant a3. This cannot promise him more than equality: for example, 3...d5 (an alternative approach is 3...♗g7 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4 d5 6 e5 ♘c6 7 ♘c3 ♘h6) 4 exd5 ♕xd5 5 d4 ♗g7 6 ♘f3 ♘c6 7 dxc5 ♕xc5 8 ♗e3 ♕a5 9 ♗c4 ♘f6 10 ♘bd2 0-0 with an easy game for Black in H.Grabner-A.Gysi, correspondence 2005.

c) 3 ♗c4 ♗g7 4 f4 (playing for a Grand Prix set-up is one of White's better ideas, if not exactly great; another move order is 4 ♘c3 ♘c6 5 f4, rather than here 5 d3 d6 6 ♘ge2 ♘f6 7 0-0 0-0 8 ♗g5 a6 9 ♕d2 b5 10 ♗a2 ♗b7 with quite a comfortable game for Black in T.Johansson-R.Palliser, Cork 2005) 4...♘c6 (4...e6!? 5 ♘c3 ♘e7 6 ♘f3 d5 7 ♗a2 might transpose, but Black has other options, including 7...dxe4 8 ♘xe4 b6) 5 ♘f3 e6

6 ♘c3 (we've now transposed to a different type of Grand Prix Attack to those seen in Chapter Four; White is, however, committed to a very early a3 which gives Black easy play) 6...♘ge7 7 0-0 d5 8 ♗a2 dxe4 9 ♘xe4 0-0 10 ♔h1 b6 already left Black slightly for choice (the superior bishops) in T.Haub-S.Savchenko, Metz 2007.

d) 3 h4 sees White continuing in ambitious vein, but after 3...h5! 4 b4 (as the inclusion of h4 and ...h5 leaves White weaker on the kingside in the long term, this might not be best; alternatively, 4 ♘c3 ♗g7 5 ♘h3 ♘c6 6 g3 d6 7 ♗g2 ♗g4!? 8 f3 ♗d7 9 d3 ♖b8 10 0-0 b5 gave Black good Closed Sicilian counterplay in I.Nemet-V.Milov, Baden 1998, and 4 d4!? cxd4 5 c3 dxc3 6 ♘xc3 ♗g7 7 ♗c4 ♘c6 8 ♘f3 ♘f6 9 ♗f4 d6 10 ♘g5 0-0 11 0-0 a6 12 ♕d2 ♘h7 didn't give White much of an improved version of variation 'a' in K.Lie-R.Djurhuus, Norwegian Championship, Sandnes 2005) 4...♗g7 5 ♘c3 b6 (just as in our main line, Black can also prefer 5...d6, as indeed Williams himself later did: 6 ♖b1 ♘c6 7 ♘f3 ♘f6 8 d3 0-0 9 ♗e2 ♘g4! gave Black good play in F.Aleskerov-S.Williams, European Championship, Kusadasi 2006) 6 ♘f3 ♘f6 7 ♘g5?! 0-0 8 ♖b1 ♘c6 9 g3 d5 saw Black logically expanding in the centre with advantage in S.Williams-I.Khairullin, European Championship, Warsaw 2005.

e) 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 h4 has been used by Bezgodov himself, and after 4...h5 we're back in the notes to White's 4th in our last variation.

3...♗g7 4 ♘c3

Probably best. The alternative 4 c3 certainly makes an ugly impression and after 4...d5! 5 exd5 (or 5 bxc5 dxe4 6 ♕a4+ ♘c6 7 ♗b5, as in C.Howell-A.Rawlinson, British League 2007, and now 7...♘f6! 8 ♗xc6+ bxc6 9 ♕xc6+ ♗d7 10 ♕b7 0-0 would have cast serious doubt on White's concept; however, even the superior 7 ♕xe4 ♘f6 8 ♕h4 0-0 9 ♘f3 e5 leaves Black with excellent play for his pawn) 5...♕xd5 6 ♘f3 ♘f6 7 ♗e2 0-0 8 c4 ♕d8 9 ♗b2 b6 10 0-0 ♗b7 Black had a very easy game in S.Mamedyarov-V.Kotronias, Calvia Olympiad 2004.

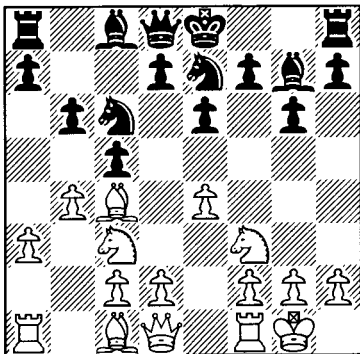
4...b6

Black is happy to see the b-file open, because once his kingside is developed, he will be well placed to contest it. Another good move is 4...d6!? after which 5 bxc5 (5 g3 ♘c6 6 ♖b1 b6 7 ♗g2 is a more solid white set-up, but after 7...♗b7 8 ♘ge2 e6 9 0-0 ♘ge7 Black had no reason to complain in K.Stokke-

O.Cvitan, Pula 2006) 5...dxc5 6 f4 ♘f6 7 ♖b1 0-0 8 ♘f3 ♘c6 9 ♗c4 has been surprisingly assessed by Bangiev as favouring White, but Black's bind on the d4-square appears to outweigh the extra central pawn and 9...♘d4 10 d3 (or 10 e5 ♘h5 11 d3 ♗g4 with good counterplay against f3 and f4) 10...♗g4 11 0-0 ♘e8!? 12 ♘e2 ♘d6 was roughly balanced in S.Gurcan-A.Greenfeld, Izmir 2004.

5 g3

The fact that White has tried a number of alternatives here suggests that he is struggling to find a good plan:

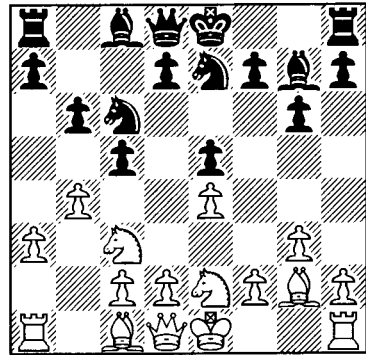
a) 5 ♗c4 ♘c6 6 ♖b1 ♘f6 7 d3 0-0 8 ♗d2 e6 9 f4 d5 (M.Corballo-J.Aagaard, Edinburgh 2007) is an excellent example of the old adage about meeting flank play with a central break.

b) 5 ♘f3 ♘c6 6 ♗c4 e6 7 0-0 ♘ge7

8 d4?! saw White trying to mix things up before Black got in ...d5 in V.Dobrov-L.Aroshidze, Kavala 2004, but after 8...cxd4 9 ♘b5 0-0 10 ♘bxd4 ♘xd4 11 ♘xd4 ♗b7 Black's raking bishops ruled the board.

c) 5 ♖b1 e6 6 g3 ♘e7 7 ♗g2 ♘bc6 8 ♘ge2 0-0 9 0-0 a5!? saw Black actually make use of the advanced white b-pawn to begin counterplay in N.Beveridge-M.White, Newport 2007.

5...e5!?

The choice of a player happy with a Botvinnik set-up. Another effective kingside development is 5...e6 and ...♘e7; compare with note 'c' to White's 5th move.

6 ♗g2 ♘e7 7 ♘ge2 ♘bc6

8 ♖b1 0-0 9 d3 d6 10 0-0 ♘d4

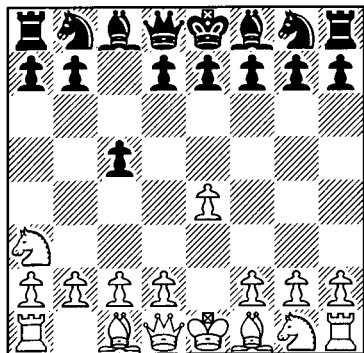
This positionally complex, but roughly even position was reached in D.Collas-I.Nataf, French League 2005.

The 2 a3 bubble appears to be bursting, due in no small part to the two systems considered here. After 2...g6 White has tried a number of approaches, but none should cause Black to lose any sleep or need anything more than common sense to counter.

B)

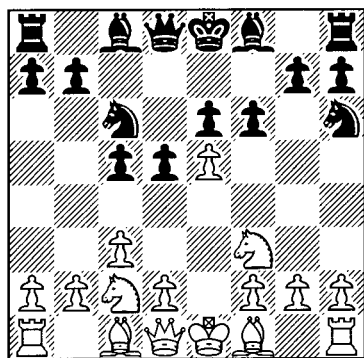
1 e4 c5 2 ♘a3

This became fashionable after being used by Vadim Zvjaginsev on no fewer

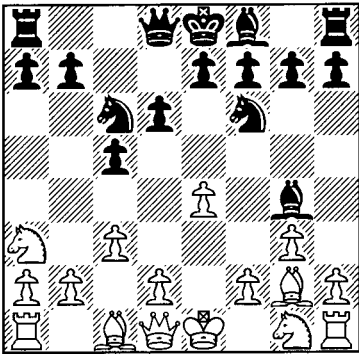
than three occasions in the 2005 Russian Championship. Since then some other grandmasters have given this odd-looking move a try as a surprise weapon and I imagine that the trend may well spread to club chess, especially after 2 ♘a3 was recommended in an *SOS* article.

2...b6!?

A specific response which is designed to take advantage of the fact that White can no longer defend e4 with his queen's knight. White's attempts to gain either a type of the Rossolimo (especially with 2...♘c6 3 ♗b5) or some sort of c3 Sicilian are now likely to fail, with a highly original game likely to occur instead.

There are a number of other playable options for Black to consider, including:

a) 2...e6 3 c3 (probably best since 3 f4 ♘c6 4 ♘f3 d5 5 e5 looked somewhat loose for White and like a reasonable version of the Grand Prix for Black in B.Savchenko-D.Jakovenko, European Championship, Dresden 2007; after 5...♘h6 6 c3 ♗d7 7 ♘c2 ♘f5 8 d4 cxd4 9 cxd4 ♖c8 10 ♗d2 ♕b6 11 ♗c3 ♘b4! Black had sufficient French-style counterplay and there are also many other options, including 6...d4!? and 9...h5) 3...d5 4 e5 (Zvjaginsev's choice, but White can also keep the centre open with 4 exd5 when 4...♕xd5 is a reasonable c3 Sicilian, with one possible continuation being 5 d4 ♘f6 6 ♘f3 with a transposition to Line B3 of Chapter One) 4...♘c6 5 ♘f3 (we've now reached a position that can also come about via the move order 2 ♘f3 e6 3 c3 d5 4 e5 ♘c6 5 ♘a3) 5...♘h6 (more ambitious than the 5...♗d7 of V.Zvjaginsev-A.Dreev, Russian Championship, Moscow 2005) 6 ♘c2 f6!?

7 exf6 (there are several other possibilities in this highly original position, including 7 d4 fxe5 8 ♗xh6 gxh6 with enough counterplay on the dark squares, such as after 9 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 10 dxe5 ♕g5 11 ♗b5+ ♗d7 12 ♗xd7+ ♔xd7, and 7 ♗b5!? ♘f7 8 exf6 gxf6!? 9 d4 ♕b6 when Black will castle long) 7...♕xf6 8 d4 cxd4 9 ♗g5 ♕g6 10 ♘cxd4 ♗d6 11 ♗h4?! (as McDonald points out, White should prefer 11 ♗d3 ♕h5

12 ♗e2, not that this changes the view that Black has a reasonable version of the French Tarrasch; for example, 12...0-0 13 h3 ♘xd4 14 cxd4 ♕g6 15 ♕d2 ♗d7 looks about equal) 11...0-0 12 ♗g3 ♗xg3 13 hxg3 e5! saw Black seize the initiative in S.Cicak-E.Berg, Malmö 2006.

b) 2...d6 has usually been met by 3 c3 ♘f6 4 g3 when Black might be happy to fight for the centre with the positionally complex 4...g6 (and not 4...♘xe4?? 5 ♕a4+ ♗d7 6 ♕xe4 ♗c6 due to 7 ♗b5) 5 ♗g2 ♗g7 6 ♘e2 0-0 7 0-0 e5, as he was happy to in V.Malakhov-L.Nisipeanu, Sarajevo 2006. I also quite like Rowson's suggestion of 2...d6 3 c3 ♘f6 4 g3 ♘c6 5 ♗g2 ♗g4!?

when Black seems to have sufficient counterplay: for example, 6 ♘e2 d5 (6...♕d7!? is a more ambitious try) 7 exd5 ♘xd5 8 h3 ♗f5 9 d4 e6 with rough equality.

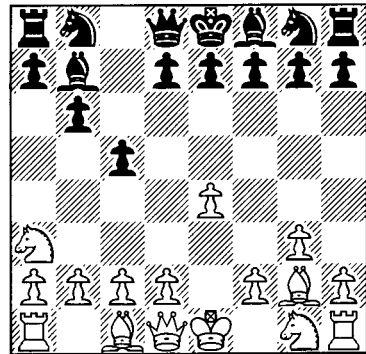
3 g3

Competing on the long diagonal has been White's main response so far in practice, but he might also consider:

a) 3 f4 ♗b7 4 d3 g6 5 c3 ♗g7 6 ♘f3 d6 7 ♗e2 ♘d7 8 c4!? a6 9 ♖b1 e6 10 0-0 ♘e7 saw Black's Hippo approach work out well in L.Tirrito-D.Genocchio, Genoa 2004; one of the ...b5, ...d5 or ...f5 breaks will bring reasonable counterplay.

b) 3 ♘e2 ♗b7 4 ♘g3 might be met by the sensible 4...g6, but possibly even better is 4...h5! since 5 ♘xh5 ♗xe4 6 ♕g4 ♗g6 7 ♘f4 ♘f6 8 ♕f3 ♗e4 (Rowson) holds everything together.

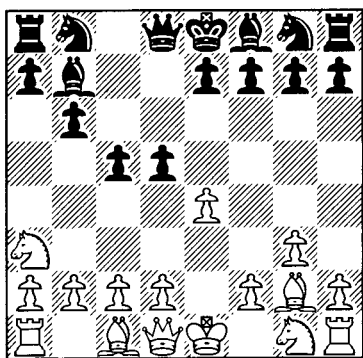
c) 3 d4!? cxd4 (3...♗b7!? 4 d5 e6 is yet another unexplored possibility) 4 ♘f3 is another idea of Rowson's from ChessPublishing, but this shouldn't be too troubling for Black after 4...♘c6!? (4...♗b7 5 ♗f4!? ♗xe4 6 ♘b5 ♘a6 7 ♘g5 ♗b7 8 ♕xd4 gives White some play for his pawn, as indicated by Rowson, not that this is at all clear) 5 ♘xd4 ♗b7 followed by a rapid ...g6 and ...♗g7.

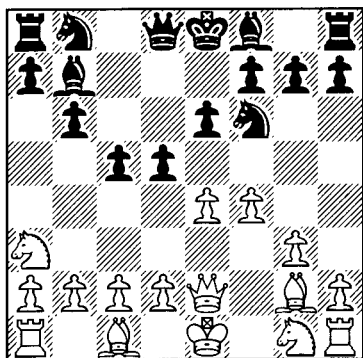
3...♗b7 4 ♗g2

4...♘f6

Continuing to develop with tempo, but this is probably no better than the alternatives:

a) 4...g6 5 ♕e2 (or 5 ♘e2 ♗g7 6 c3 ♘f6 7 d3 0-0 8 0-0 and now 8...♘c6 is

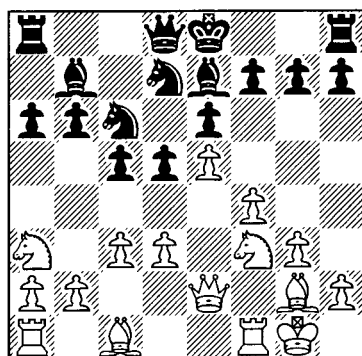
indicated, rather than 8...d6? 9 e5! and White won two pieces for a rook in V.Malakhov-S.Shipov, Moscow (blitz) 2006) 5...♗g7 6 f4 ♘c6 7 c3 d6 8 ♘h3 (a second knight goes to the rim, but I suspect that Shabalov later began to regret this as the centre opened) 8...♕d7 9 0-0 0-0-0!? 10 d3 ♔b8 11 ♗e3 f5 gave Black reasonable counterplay in A.Shabalov-E.Paehtz, Port Erin 2006.

b) 4...d5

5 e5 ♘c6 6 f4 e6 7 ♘f3 ♘h6 8 0-0 ♗e7 9 c3 d4!? 10 ♘c4 ♕d7 was roughly balanced in B.Savchenko-V.Belov, Russian Championship 2007.

5 ♕e2 e6 6 f4 d5

Black's queenside isn't as advanced as in Chapter Two, but contesting the centre like this still makes a lot of sense.

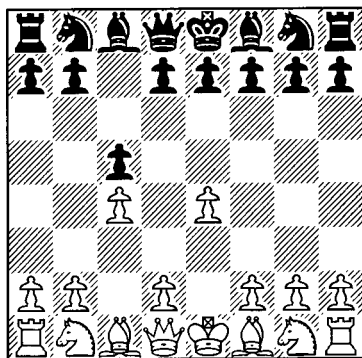
7 e5 ♘fd7 8 ♘f3 ♗e7

This type of position, albeit with Black's bishop usually on c8, can arise from a number of different openings. In general it's quite uncharted and here Black seems to have a reasonable position. Quite simply, the a3-knight is a little misplaced, preventing White from holding up ...b5 with a4.

9 d3 ♘c6 10 c3 a6 11 0-0

We've been following A.Stripunsky-I.Krush, New York 2006, in which Black now became too ambitious: 11...d4?! 12 f5! and the idea of 12...exf5 13 e6 left White better. Much better is the calm 11...0-0 (Martin) with a reasonable position, such as after 12 ♘c2 b5 13 d4 ♕b6 14 ♗e3 b4 with decent counterplay.

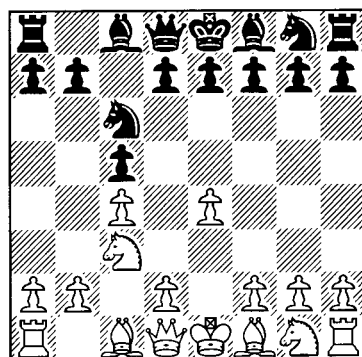
2 ♘a3 is not the sort of move that Black needs to spend too long studying. There are a number of reasonable responses: choose one, have a quick look at a few ideas and you should be fine.

c)

1 e4 c5 2 c4

Pretty rare, but a move which may appeal to those white players who also have some experience with the Botvinnik English.

2...Nc6

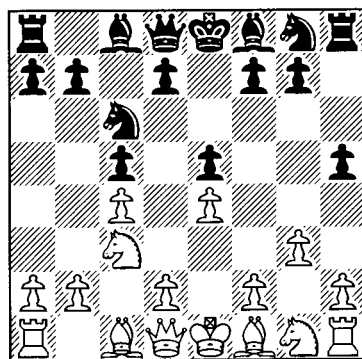
Immediately eyeing the weakened d4-square. Another good option is 2...e6 when White's best is either 3 Nf3 or 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 Nf3, transposing to a position which 2...e6 Sicilian players should have in their repertoire via the move order 2 Nf3 e6 3 c4.

3 Nc3

3...e5!?

The simplest and a good way to keep the game in fairly independent waters. A more popular approach is 3...g6 after which play transposes to a line of the Symmetrical English: 4 g3 Bg7 5 Bg2 and now Black's main options, none of which require too much expertise to employ, are 5...Nf6, 5...e6 and 5...e5; the last of those being covered, along with 5...a6!?, in Everyman's recent *Beating Unusual Chess Openings*.

4 g3

White doesn't have to fianchetto here or on the next move, but after 4 d3 d6 5 a3!? Be7 (a key idea behind our move order: Black reasons that his bishop is no less active on e7 than g7) 6 Rb1 a5 he could find nothing better than 7 g3 in B.Savchenko-I.Kurnosov, Russian Team Championship 2007, after which 7...f5! 8 Bh3 fxe4 9 Nxe4 Nf6 gave Black good counterplay.

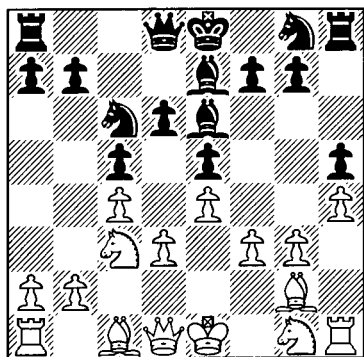
4...h5!?

An old suggestion of Keres'. Once again the alternative 4...g6 5 Bg2 Bg7 transposes to more standard Symmetrical English lines.

5 h4

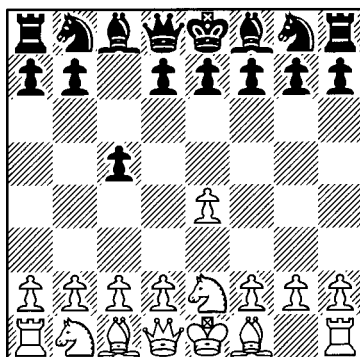
The most natural way of halting Black's attempt to gain an early king-side initiative. Also possible is 5 h3, but after 5...h4 6 g4 ♘ge7 7 ♘ge2 ♘d4 Black is pretty comfortable. T.L'Henoret-R.Roelens, correspondence 1997, continued instructively: 8 ♗g2 ♘ec6 9 0-0 ♗e7 10 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 11 ♘e2 ♘xe2+ 12 ♕xe2 ♗g5! 13 d3 ♗xc1 14 ♖axc1 d6 and Black was slightly for preference due to his better bishop.

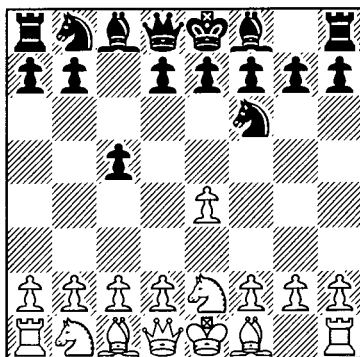
5...d6 6 ♗g2 ♗g4

Now we can see why Black wanted to include the moves ...h5 and h4: 7 ♘ge2 ♘ge7 and 8...♘d4 leaves White a little tangled.

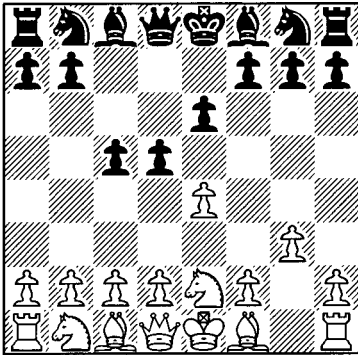
7 f3 ♗e6 8 d3 ♗e7

Keres' analysis in *ECO* ended at this point with an assessment of equal. That seems correct, although the position remains strategically quite complicated: when to play ...♘d4, how best to develop the king's knight and even whether a quick ...g5 is possible are all questions for Black to mull over. Personally I'd prefer to be Black here due to both those active options and because White must always be careful not to remain saddled for the whole game with an ineffective light-squared bishop.

D)

1 e4 c5 2 ♘e2

Vallejo has used this slightly unusual move a fair amount of late. Usually it transposes to an Open Sicilian, but there are a few move order points to be aware of.

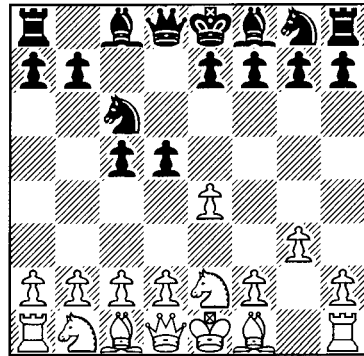
2...♘f6!?

A semi-independent try and a move which should be considered by those who meet 2 ♘f3 with 2...d6. Before examining the possible problems with

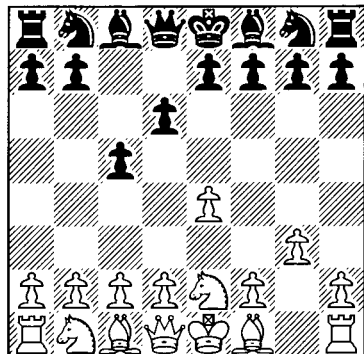
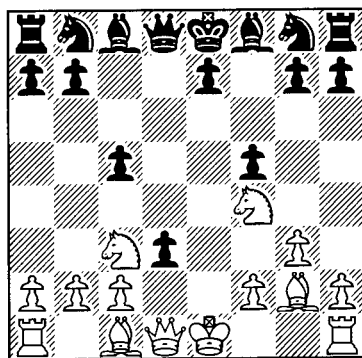
2...d6 in this position, we should have a quick look at Black's other two main options:

a) 2...e6 is usually met by 3 ♘c3, transposing to Line B2 of Chapter Five, or 3 d4. There isn't really a good independent alternative since 3 g3 d5

4 exd5?! is met by 4...♛xd5 when White must move his rook. Neither do the alternatives here trouble Black:

a1) 4 ♗g2 dxe4 5 ♗xe4 ♘f6 6 ♗g2 ♗d7!? 7 0-0 (7 ♗xb7 ♘c6 8 ♗xa8 ♛xa8 followed by ...♘e5 is a promising exchange sacrifice: 9 f4 ♘e5 10 0-0 ♘f3+ 11 ♖xf3 ♛xf3 12 ♘ec3 ♛b7 13 d3 h5 is possible, leaving Black with good play for his pawn) 7...♗c6 8 d4 ♗xg2 9 ♔xg2 ♘c6 10 dxc5 ♗xc5 gave Black very comfortable equality in A.Galliamova-E.Ghaem Maghami, Moscow 2005.

a2) 4 d3 dxe4 5 dxe4 ♛xd1+ 6 ♔xd1 b6! 7 a4 ♗b7 8 f3 ♘c6 9 ♘a3 h5! 10 ♔e1 0-0-0 was a model set-up from Black in Kr.Georgiev-M.Suba, Warsaw 1987. Just as in Line B of our Closed coverage when White doesn't exchange on d5, Black should always fight for control of the long diagonal in these manoeuvring lines.

b) 2...♘c6 tends to immediately transpose to an Open Sicilian or to Line A2 of Chapter Five after 3 ♘c3. Once again 3 g3 d5! is an easy equalizer;

for example, 4 ♗g2 dxe4 5 ♗xe4 ♗g4!? (the more restrained 5...♘f6 6 ♗g2 g6 has also done well in practice) 6 0-0?! ♛d7 7 ♗g2 h5! 8 d3 h4 9 ♗e3 e5 and White was already on the back foot in Ang.Tzermiadianos-D.Anagnostopoulos, Athens 1997.

c) So what could be wrong with 2...d6? Quite often White continues 3 d4, but 3 g3!? is a tricky, little independent system.

Black probably does best to respond in kind: 3...d5!? (again exploiting the fact that White doesn't really want to exchange on d5; the alternative 3...♘f6 4 ♗g2 g6 5 0-0 ♗g7 6 c3! 0-0 7 d4 ♘c6 8 h3 illustrates White's main idea, although this might well be acceptable enough to some readers after Rowson's 8...e5!?) 4 ♗g2 (pretty much essential: 4 e5 ♘c6 5 f4 is not what White wants to be doing and 4 ♘bc3 d4 is also fine for Black; note that here White must retreat to b1, whereas 5 ♘d5?? g5! 6 d3 h6 7 ♗g2 e6 was a most embarrassing accident for the French no.1 in E.Bacrot-E.Relange, French League 2006) 4...dxe4 5 ♘bc3!? (critical, whereas 5 ♗xe4 ♘f6 6 ♗g2 is much easier for Black: Rowson's suggestion of 6...g6 looks like a good option, and another is 6...♘c6 7 d3 ♗f5 8 ♗e3 e6 9 h3 h6, as in Y.Arkhipkin-S.Janovsky, Moscow 1988) 5...f5!? (and a critical response which I feel is fully playable, although it's still too early for theory to have reached a verdict on this rare gambit; a solid alternative is 5...♘f6 6 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 7 ♗xe4 ♘c6 8 d3 ♗g4! when White's strong bishop is offset by Black's of d4 control and 9 h3 ♗d7 10 ♗e3 e5 11 ♘c3 ♗d6 12 g4!? 0-0 13 h4 ♘d4! had become quite double-edged in Y.Balashov-E.Najer, Bor 2000 – note Black's important 8th move which reminds White that it's not just Black who can have some light-squared issues to address) 6 d3 (both Rowson and Bangiev have analysed this move, but as far as I can see, it remains unplayed; 5...f5's two outings so far have instead seen the similar 6 0-0 ♘f6 7 d3 exd3 8 ♘f4 and now 8...♘c6 9 ♖e1!? dxc2 10 ♗xc6+ bxc6 11 ♕xc2 ♔f7!? 12 ♕e2 – 12 ♕b3+ ♘d5 13 ♘cxd5 cxd5 14 ♘xd5 e6 15 ♘f4 ♕b6 was presumably Black's idea and returning one of the pawns thus makes a lot of sense – 12...♕d6 13 ♘d3 ♘d5 was quite unclear in V.Baklan-A.Tukhaev, Alushta 2007, with White having the safer king and better structure, but at the cost of two pawns) 6...exd3 7 ♘f4

7...♘f6 (wisely trying to catch up in development) 8 ♕xd3!? (8 0-0 transposes to the note to White's 6th, while Black should be OK after 8 ♘xd3 e6 9 0-0 ♗e7 10 ♖e1 0-0 11 ♗f4 ♘c6 – Bangiev – since he has a pawn to suffer for and 12 ♘b5 can be met by 12...c4!?; for example, 13 ♘e5 ♘xe5 14 ♕xd8 ♖xd8 15 ♗xe5 ♘g4! with some counterplay) 8...♕xd3 9 ♘xd3 ♘bd7 10 ♗f4 c4 11 ♘e5 ♘xe5 12 ♗xe5 ♔f7 is analysis by Rowson. Of course, White retains compensation due to Black's over-advanced c- and f-pawns, but like the Scottish GM, I haven't been able to find a powerful follow-up and a pawn is a pawn!

This way of playing with 5...f5 looks possible, but is a little greedy and so I imagine that many readers may prefer 5...♘f6. Overall, the good news for 2...d6 fans is that 3 g3 may not be as awkward as has been feared.

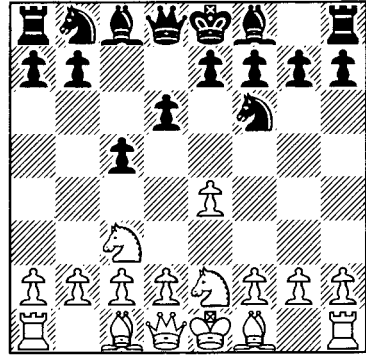
Returning to 2...♘f6:

3 ♘bc3

Probably best since the alternatives fail to impress:

a) 3 e5 ♘g4! 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♕xd4 d6 (5...h5!? also deserves serious consideration, targeting e5 and trying to induce 6 f4 which is an advance White would prefer to avoid) 6 exd6 ♘c6!? 7 dxe7 ♕xe7 8 ♕f4 g6 9 ♘a3 ♗h6! 10 ♕g3 ♗xc1 11 ♖xc1 0-0 gave Black plenty of activity for his pawn in A.Lutikov-D.Bronstein, Parnu 1971.

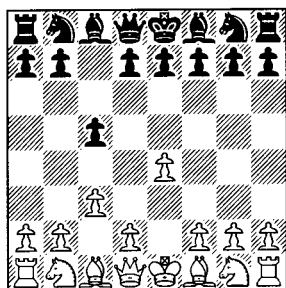
b) 3 ♘g3 ♘c6 also leaves White's king's knight looking a little misplaced and 4 f4 a6!? 5 d3 g6, intending ...♗g7 and ...d5 (or if e5, ...♘d5 and ...d6 to break up White's centre), was quite reasonable for Black in C.Yurtseven-R.Casafus, Dubai Olympiad 1986.

3...d6

White now has nothing better than either 4 d4 with an Open Sicilian or 4 g3 g6 5 ♗g2 ♗g7, taking play back into Line A3 of our Closed Sicilian coverage. This transpositional possibility seems as a good a time as any to wrap up our coverage of White's alternatives to 2 ♘f3 in the Sicilian. As in many variations which we've considered, don't forget about the various move order options for both sides after 2 ♘e2 and you'll gain a reasonable position or even an Open Sicilian!

Index of Variations

1 e4 c5 and now:

A: 2 c3
B: 2 ♘c3
C: others

A) 2 c3

2...d5 3 exd5 ♕xd5 4 d4 ♘c6

4...♘f6 5 ♘f3 e6 6 ♗e3 (6 ♗d3 – *42*; 6 ♗e2 – *45*; 6 ♘a3 – *51*) 6...cxd4 7 cxd4 ♗b4+ – *55*

5 ♘f3 ♗g4

5...♘f6 – *38*

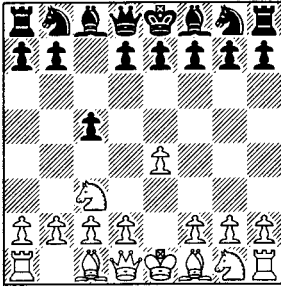
6 ♗e2

6 dxc5 – *28*

6...cxd4 7 cxd4 e6 8 h3 ♗h5 9 ♘c3 ♕a5

10 0-0 – *16*

10 d5 – *22*

B) 2 ♘c3

2...♘c6

2...e6 3 g3 (3 f4 – *145*; 3 ♘f3 – *178*; 3 ♘ge2 – *179*) 3...d5 4 exd5 exd5 5 ♗g2 (5 d4 – *120*) 5...♘f6 6 d3 ♗e7 – *123*

2...a6 3 ♘ge2 (3 g3 – *68*; 3 f4 – *74*; 3 ♘f3 – *80*) 3...♘f6 4 g3 b5 5 ♗g2 ♗b7 6 d4 (6 0-0 – *77*) 6...cxd4 7 ♘xd4 e6 – *77*

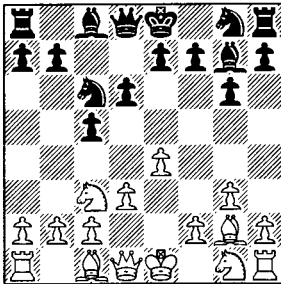
3 g3

3 f4 e6 4 ♘f3 d5 5 ♗b5 ♘ge7 6 exd5 (6 0-0 – *131*; 6 ♘e5 – *135*; 6 ♕e2 – *137*) 6...♘xd5 – *140* (6...exd5 – *140*)

3 ♗b5 ♘d4 4 ♗c4 (4 ♘f3 e6 – *168*) 4...e6 5 ♘f3 ♘e7 – *171*

3 ♘ge2 – *175*

3 ♘f3 – *176*

3...g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7 5 d3 d6

6 f4

6 ♘ge2 – *108*

6 ♘h3 – *113*

6 ♘f3 – *116*

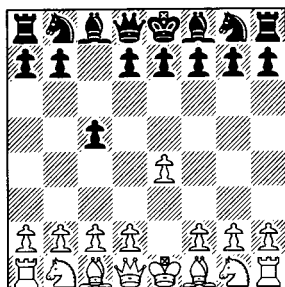
6 ♗e3 ♖b8 (6...♘f6 7 h3 e5 – *93*) 7 ♕d2 b5 8 ♘ge2 (8 f4 – *101*) 8...b4 9 ♘d1 ♘d4 10 0-0 e5 – *103*

6...♘f6 7 0-0 0-0

7...♗g4 – *85*

8 0-0 ♖b8 9 h3 b5 10 a3 – *87*

10 g4 – *88*

C) Others

2 d4

2 a3 – *239*

2 ♘a3 – *243*

2 c4 – *247*

2 ♘e2 – *246*

2 ♘f3 e6 3 c3 d5 4 e5 d4 5 ♗d3 – *63* (5 cxd4 – *61*)

2 f4 d5 (2...e6 – *161*) 3 exd5 (3 ♘c3 – *152*) 3...♘f6 4 ♗b5+ (4 c4 – *154*) 4...♘bd7 5 c4 a6 6 ♗xd7+ – *156* (6 ♗a4 – *156*)

2 d3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7 5 f4 d6 6 ♘f3 ♘f6 7 0-0 0-0 8 c3 – *184* (8 h3 – *184*)

2 g3 d5 3 exd5 ♕xd5 4 ♘f3 ♘c6 – *187*

2 b3 d6 (2...♘c6 3 ♗b2 ♘f6 – *196*) 3 ♗b2 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 – *190* (4 ♗xf6 – *190*; 4 ♗b5+ – *191*)

2 b4 cxb4 3 a3 (3 d4 – *230*; 3 ♘f3 – *235*) 3...d5 (3...bxa3 – *224*) 4 exd5 ♕xd5 5 ♘f3 e5 – *226*

2...cxd4 3 c3 dxc3 4 ♘xc3 ♘c6

4...e6 5 ♘f3 a6 6 ♗c4 b5 7 ♗b3 ♗b7 8 ♕e2 (8 a3 – *216*; 8 0-0 – *217*) 8...d6 (8...♘e7 – *219*) 9 0-0 ♘d7 – *220*

5 ♘f3 d6 6 ♗c4 a6 7 0-0

7 ♗g5 – *202*

7...♘f6 8 ♕e2 – *205*

8 h3 – *208*

8 b4 – *211*

8 ♗f4 – *214*

fighting the anti-Sicilians

The Sicilian Defence is by far Black's most popular answer to 1 e4 at all levels of chess. The reason for this is easy to understand: from the very first move Black unbalances the position and can play for a win without needing to take unjustified risks. This is particularly the case with the Open Sicilian, where Black can take comfort from the knowledge that his superior pawn structure ensures control of the centre and excellent long-term chances.

Faced with this problem, along with the fact that Open Sicilians generally carry a massive build-up of theory, it's unsurprising that many White players prefer to play one of the various 'Anti-Sicilian' lines on offer. These numerous alternatives to 2 Nf3 include the primitive but dangerous Grand Prix Attack, one or two wild gambits, and also some tedious and niggling variations such as 2 c3 and the Closed Sicilian, which are designed to stamp out any fun Black was envisaging when playing 1...c5.

These annoying lines have become the scourge of Sicilian players, but in this book Richard Palliser, a lifelong Sicilian devotee, decides it's time for Black players to finally fight back! Drawing upon his vast experience and understanding of Anti-Sicilians, Palliser creates a dynamic and practical repertoire for Sicilian players to use against these possibilities. In many instances he offers more than one solution for Black – ambitious or solid – and he pays special attention to tricky move orders, weapons that present-day players are likely to use.

- Essential reading for Sicilian players
- Covers all of White's alternatives to 2 Nf3
- Written by a renowned Sicilian expert

Richard Palliser is an International Master with numerous tournament successes to his name, and in 2006 he became Joint British Rapidplay Champion. He has already established a reputation as a skilled and prolific chess writer; previous works for Everyman Chess include *Starting Out: Sicilian Najdorf* and *Beating Unusual Chess Openings*, both of which were warmly received by the critics and chess public alike.

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